

LOKI DETAINED

My hands can't stand the barren tree: wood pulls oils from my thumbs,
cracks palms, sinks splinters into skin tunnels. Leaned here,
I feel the sun sink creeping dusk. Peel: I cannot stop, searching
to write. Ink is passion sleeping between leaves in folio,
waiting for eyes. It is enough for most to touch, cut, build, carve

the barking dog of snapped and twisted grain, leaving sheaths of green
wood

to curl and bristle in the light. I need the naked
sheets, the trunk bare to elements, limbs whistling for their green,
defying lightning. I weave the strips I bit, threads that I will
kneel for when snow goes, myself shadow, darkest eyelid

where what has been and morning intersect. I'll brush next autumn's
arms, candle-fire nests; remember that my hands are wrenched
behind my back, my cheek pressed to the alder: I cupped my crooked hands
over his, folded his fingers over the sprig, dough around a seed. I felt
the dart lift from my fingers and his fingers. Ravens dropped among the
atolls

of the thunderheads. I kissed the poet's thumbs. The blond man
laughing stones from the green wings of his garments, toadstools
sweetening his tongue. Embers lighting on his fingers. Giggling
and boasting. Drumbeat of the zebra's heart as the leopard creeps.
The concave petals of my borrowed eyelids drumming

as he breathed. His eye-sockets billowing. A cry among the players
as the brightest fell, I felt pummeling of fists, bodies on me, arms
around my ankles, cloth falling over me. Sunlight streaked through weave
of fine green filaments. My chin jammed grass
that shunned me, forehead slammed on stone. Slipped

into weasel, into wolf. Leapt
from the cliff-face onto thunderhead, and fell, lightning
under the thunder's roll. Crow amongst the burning ash,
serpent at the world tree's roots. Slipped into salmon
quicksilver in water, finally caught in my own net. Taste

of soil: vengeance of earthworms and mealy-bugs. My body
dripped out of its hag sack into Loki. Sleep. Anvil
bleeding in the piles of stones the children gathered. Finned things,
whales and coelacanths, fanning the mountainside
to cud me. Desert lion batting at the dung beetle. Caravans

on tracks carried prisoners to ovens. Sun
stealing water from my blood, baked into clumps
of char. Children riddling my mouth with knots. Bones
thrown to the moon wolf, the sun wolf gorging on stars. Only one

of jealous boys who beat off the favored son. King of hollow stalk:

hawk-father. Harridan who fooled a flower
into murder. Woke:
days of red nets under eyelid
scabs. Rain falling to ignore my wounds. Woke to hear
sobbing titmouse and wood-weasels, my hands

pierced by a gold ring. Roots gnarling in my head, spreading
on wet parchment: veins in eyes. Should I make this crutch naked,
ready to be blown? I gnaw a hole to exorcise my tongue. I burst, gush,
push over, thrash, trunk curved twisted, branches dangling where bubbles
reveal
bone-nets of the birds that never made it up. My body composed of birds,

wind-betrayed kites. My hands can't snatch at this trap
shaped like a hand. Below me, bloody lines dry brown,
blow toward the cliff-face, peepers hopping
vanish at the edge. I bite my tongue to bleed, bleed
in symbols, signifying tree. Hear it keen within my arms,

growing outward,
 ring by ring, to draw me into
 it, its bark
a mouth opening
 to nibble me.
 I wait. Snow
blankets me in facets: bearded, numb. I circle
 the circumference weighted under ice.

I.

BALDER'S AMNESTY FROM THE ANIMALS

One of us is missing. It is spring. We are restless, fur in claw, flint on leaf on forest, spark of hooves on bone. The monkey-house stinks of urine and shrieks, rocks like a twit. The parrots are screaming Approach! Storm, or stampede, menagerie encapsulated in its cages: dumb. Spectators chortling. One of us is missing,

and the squeal of tearing iron.

You guard the hill: spider shadows splayed on slanted webs. You ambulate through casualties of the zoo. Lions stumbling from twisted cages, sloths blinking in kudzu. Now, night will guard you in the ripples

of its robes, your voice stalks itself: thunder, spark association—then it counts the dead. One. Two. Three. Bereft of memory, you begin with the first: son killed swimming. A shadow mulls the landscape—only the prodigal darkened without you. Hear? Crying wells in the throats of the golden. Stand before a truth of profundity:

a forest of holes. There is nothing to perch on. Cities dim the harbor edge. The calliope cautions and bursts into dissonance: thriving whines that garner silence. The ticket collector gathers the thumbs. Watch the clocks wrestle free. We are loose. It is always spring. Now, one of you is missing.

THE BLIND GOD'S SONG

Burned blind I am nothing: ghost chilled to the blade
in grass, moonlight on the dagger's side. The sockets
pop. The crook-moon's hook brittle on the shade-ledge
the tern's swift swerving into air give off. The echo
of a cough. I am shadows in the feathers that frost

the church's windows in the dark. I am the dark,
dilating guess-hoops in a blind man's eyes. I am
the dyes of autumn huddled in the seasons of a leaf,
and I am grief, in baby-bone, awaiting the first loss.
Moss scratching up the north arms of the elm. If I

moored here in the thrash of sea denied all sleep,
what could keep me from constant motion? The shy girl
that the starlight wears who bends to love the ocean?
But still, hear? Hush. Hush tricks the salt in deeps
to fight the wind against its will. Blue deeps

would rather sleep. The moon slips from its gauze,
its favorite face, fecund and cool, enacts the entr'acte
in boots. Exeunt. Beckoning. Nagging the sand
as undertow, sea teasing, retreating meters from the crime.
I am all rhyme, all howl and cry, an upward surge

of bats. The split-lip bawdy barrelhouse sung to me
by rats escaping the ship they gnawed the bottom of.
I am the snail that slurps along the leaf, leaving
glittering ribbons drying on green, new skin, embossed
by my travel, fends against rain. Fires of time will rise
in me, rise, bite each stem, send the shining fingers

ground-ward. Loss captains my elation: bitter, sing! Bitter.
I am the body. Scattered. Wind fathers the pillow, in sleep:
cheek against it. I am the sparrow that wings into the window,
throat opened in greeting at such sight—flies from its sinews
among shards, collects the nests of eyes, and flies again, cry

without communiqué. Slim trees burn, leaves of flame: thin god
as leaves, blue-rimmed, edges drooling to soot. The stars
pulse with meaning, retarding history. See me in the air—
a thousand years—just that—a frequency, a hum. The snapping
of my wing-bones on the wind. The closed eye of the cave,

where what has been born crane their necks toward the heat.

LOKI'S LOVE SONG

I.

Teaching me something that I had forgotten, this was
your gift: a sack of dried olives. The trees swell

the dark compartment in the corner. You hold up one
finger to puppet "Nun." You hold two fingers,

Punch and Judy. A third snaps up, yowls and pukes
milk bubbles at my feet; they shift anxiously to make

away. You stand in the bath-tub, singing me drought.
Hugging the street-lamp, you recant famine of light.

You pound the foot-bridge I walk, screaming "Earthquake!"
Two fingers again: plague. You stand erect, a delicate

finger. You wave your arms: you are a hand, and then,
these fists battering down upon me until my face

is a ragged kite of bloodied paper. "Love," you whisper,
licking my brow. You cuddle my inwards to keep warm.

II.

I curl my toes around the buzzard's neck, and pull. Its frond-
like head bends down, a disappointed penis: bald, without

breath. A limp balloon. In cloud, or out of wedlock, I make my hands
my own repast: suck knuckle, down mead piggishly, belch and chuckle

that hurts the old coot's high. Isn't it lovely watching scavengers
with their beaks at my belt and their shrieks wreathing these pendulous

friends? I begin here: the moon, myself. Night sews purses
of our lips, drops stars in, flutters its silks embroidered

with stallions. I whisper into the moon's ear: cloud whistle,
ravens on cypresses, what a valley confesses while the villagers

sleep. I am his eyesight, each blink a frame in the motion
of dark: sun drenches my atoms with rain, thinking, colors—

spirit forgive mouths opened again. Our tongues lax,
but learn, shout in defiance of the crowd. We contemplate

animal stillness. This, our dominion, darkness. Moon,
you still the owl's agenda, turning its fragrant gaze like a screw.

GOBBLE

We are at the core of what is gone: we breathe.
Hot belly where the blond boy leans his head. The baby-

sucking of the supplicant, his hand cupped near the rim.
I hold his scalp in my hand, clutching at the roots. I pull

my fingers in to make him wince. He squints and takes
me in. I close my eyes to hear his mouth around my prick,

the lick, saliva dripping from my lips down the walnut crease
of sack. I spread my legs and thrust, tuck my free hand

underneath his arm and grope for his nipple, cut through
with a silver ring. I loop my finger in and pull my head toward his:

lunge in and with a sudden tug and twist of neck push his head
aside and bite his ear: I hear his deep, sad sigh. I grapple

with both hands his neck, lick slowly up his throat, across his chin,
his mouth, his nose, then pull back startled to see his eyes

closing slowly, squeezing free a single tear. I brush it from his cheek
as if it were an eyelash, or the transparent panes of bee a wing is:

iridescent, splendid, frightening. I want to drink this little bit
of him, hold his trembling body back from darkness,

from the animals of night, the harsh light that will catch him
in his work-clothes, growing older at the edges of his eyes. I want

to speak to him, I want to know his name. I want to care for him, but can't.

MOON

Moon, my first word, leaped
from my mother's shoulder: his light soothed my eyes.
The painted wooden hook
of the Mother Goose mobile: cows leaping, me sailing.
Creation hung by a string,
but earth was steadfast at my feet, and I ran—
a deer they said, but small

hills defined me. At three, advancing waves
galloped toward my hand's wake,
its gravity upon the water: sky-face
and I were of a people. The other
faces loomed above me,
drew me in to what they feared
and hated, the great web of the common language,
their arms were vehicles my breath steered
and my mouth propelled—my eyes

set on my family. He followed me silently
behind all those trees. Now, someone is falling.
The moon unscrews itself
from the trees, wary friend, makes no attempt
to slow or stop

my body from crumpling
to the ground, origami animal on rubble
near the driveway. Heartbeat: stallion hooves. Sound recedes:
my body stiffens,

a dark horizon. The wind stumbles
over me, thumbs my eyes
shut, flakes of whispers settle
on my skin. Wide-eyed,
he drapes me

in a blanket of apologies, a gift that I
consider useless. Warmth
aches upon our sleeping bodies like a kiss.

THE KING OF THE TREES

Nothing surprises the king of the trees. He stands resolute,
atop the burnt hill, without roots, feigning the dead to fool
the squirrels. But he grows, and he knows the blue sky's light,
turns, and rears, and swallows night. Does nothing surprise him?
But that's

not me. If you knew me, you would chuckle aloud.
I am nothing but a stone with fossils mired into its sides,
stone leaves burned in some old fire, miniscule bones
in a broken-shelled fly who crawled up into a nut to die,
lending no cry: halves of whispers. A little boy with grass
in his hair, blades of straw in his teeth, who gathered together
smooth rocks in a throng. I

am nothing but the shade
of an ancient king who ruled flooded lands on the cup
of a leaf. The tree, tall master, falls dead at my feet. One thing.
One thing surprised the wise king of the trees.

CHALK

I.

You bloodied your leg against
the hopscotch circle's edge:
purple fades, gleams underneath—
the orange tabby pads, watching its buried

twin steal along beneath, paws at an acorn, twists
its head. Sunlight breaks against
the red barn. What do you draw
into the pale spot, dusty

from the sun, with your last nub of chalk,
whetted with spit? You scratch
the oblong head, the amber eyes,
tent-pointed ears and trinity

of irradiating whiskers on each side. You scratch
one paw, held out at angles
from his face, the acorn
a blob of white paste wedged

underneath a claw
that might well be a voracious beetle with sharp legs.
The cartoon smile, typical sun hangs
in the corner, with rays like pins that magnify,

as if through prisms,
the cat's moustache. Pushed down against
the gray cement, chalk dries into a crooked ribbon,
imaginary trees.

II.

It doesn't seem like much, the way
that they play: one little girl rolling
marbles through ashes, a boy and girl tossing
a canvas bean-sack between them, or the squealing boys

kissing off behind the playground shack. Another boy cuts
paper flowers on the sandbox's edge—he hears,
when he is listening, wasps
skirting the petals of the lilacs

by the creek. He waits,
sees how the insect's brown legs snap in
and fuss—or are they fussed about
by snapping mandibles? The school-bell rings.

Dust fills the air, with the slapping of the dust-caked
shoes. Chalk lies in pastel fragments
on the blacktop's edge. He leans
a little closer, where the water changes,

where it catches
green and gold the sun flirts at it with
through the folded, unconnected
netting of the leaves. Beneath the water,

water takes the faces of the stones away, making
them smooth. It doesn't matter what they did there,
on cement, with their rope, their jacks, their hands. Even on the edge
of their activity, he heard their sounds,

how they bickered, hated, wooed, more quickly
than the dust could settle in their socks.
When their Nerf-ball knocked him
on the head, and teasing shouts cracked through,

he hated. The yellow striping of the wasps burned
a little brighter in their voices' absence.
They fiddled
at the scraps of paper in their nest, sailed out,

returned with what was useful to put in. It seems uncertain
why anything with like wings would snap
at matches, lint, or strands of plastic Easter grass, grab
both ends, and buzzing angrily, veer off

in separate directions.

BAG

It hurts to see the kindling crack apart the tensed net
of its branches to release the flame. If I had been
that paper bag, I would have wept, reached out

with my sharp lips to hold me here, inside the rim
of this rusted metal drum. Self-important little bag!
Why can't you see what a waste your folded time has been?
Not strange among the porcupines and elms

made up of pulp, filaments of other things, brought
into light by accident. These stars, coming through
in veils behind the first, bright constellations

are speckles in a timid sneeze. I would like to think
that I would have been a humbler, but a more daring,
sack than you: glossy, green and red, a Christmas covering,
bulb-nosed grannies stirring cookies in a bowl,

children building igloos in the shadow of a train—
a cold, blue moon grinning lewdly in a stippled sky.
As if I had a choice, as if any one of us

had choices what our bodies are, or what we hold
inside. More likely, I would have been a splotch of ink
beneath the sheen, a freezing man shaking
a bright brass bell, drooling icicles into my pointy beard

of fiberglass and rubber-bands. A part of paper
ruled by fear of paper, inhabiting the weave,
vastly troubled by the grumbling of the packages inside,

by the folding and unfolding, the kitchen cabinets and dark
department stores of sleep. I am terrified
to be a part of paper and afraid to burn. I find
myself, day after day, ringing that bell, the empty street

devoid of boys to grant me moss-green cents
to rattle into my scarlet caldron, or to take the paper
paper poppy from my extended hand. This bag has been

a living death, being lithographed, or not lithographed—
dizzy thoughts that agonize flat days. But if I saw them—
then what—change? Who could say that if, startled
by the wingspan of the munching deer, I wouldn't flee?

BOBBING FOR APPLES

The chrome red and gold globes
spin in the cold black water
of the fiber-board and brown Formica

bucket once meant to be
the belly of an old ice-cream maker. Now,
the crank and the blades are gone,

and the moon shines through
the cobwebs of the cellar window
to the surface of the water: stars,

cosmetic silver powder
left by moth's wings. The children stand
around it, staring in,

well of uncertain bottom where
the voice of a boy, wincing from baritone,
thrums across the aluminum drum

of the oil-tank. A jostling of burlap
and taffeta—the older boys prod
the whelps to the rim until one grabs

a thin geek by the neck,
and with one fluid motion,
dunks the head in:

air is exchanged for
the blindness of drowning, then
with lungs bursting,

the kid opens his eyes: a liquid
like pupils, crowded with planets,

umbilicus-scarred, and his head

a pike on a chain pushing its prey
to the bottom, its first bite
the deadly one: baby Jupiter

still in its clench, his skin giving way
like fresh meat beneath rawhide,
crimson and white.

CICADAS

At first, I dance for him, bending
my ankle, lowering my eyes
to his: they're not like us, those bugs. We toil beneath
the moaning of guitars, the sex

of drums. Our heads knit complicated
brocades from the dull: the dull surround us.
Look how blurred I am! I can't cut
through anything. I beg for love— me leaning in like this

to pull some word from him. He reminded me
of sea-grass leaning towards the waves, he had
the clarity of sorrow, something I could keep. Only
stupid happy babies let you bend in their embraces. Look

for me. I will be waiting, like any phantom,
with my dressing-gown of starlight on. In his rooms,
I grow accustomed to my awe. Blue water breaking
into foam—I do not have your purple spotted prairie to replace it, shattering

you, seeping into stones
the rain you are combing down the grass
and in his arms, yourself, black and gray, a dry sky
quick with lightning. I go tonight to greet that mountain,

my beloved. He is fixed, would be completed,
blown dry, like a doctrine,
or the small glass paws of alabaster cats
kept in museums, will have no answers

to the absolutes he breathes, convinced that he is drowning:
my face, a stone, wrapped
in my face, to pull him safely down. I grow

smaller, desiccated, my skin peels off like wings
as I listen to the piping, persistent voices in the leaves.

DRY WOOD

I will place him in an orchard, a great hill of spotted apples,
fallen fruit snarled in gray nettles. Willows everywhere,
their taproots fraying to a river through black clay
with certain thirst. He is almost ready for the dusk,
the rocking branches and the birds whose feet
would grasp the hackles of his neck and twist him sideways,
luring his body through matrices of switches
toward the light spinning on the water. How can he

be saddened here? Mossy oaks, peeling birch, pathetic ranks
of sunflowers inattentive to the striped folding chairs
on the varnished, redwood patio? How can he give me
what I need? He walks toward me, bearded, his brown hair black
in sweaty spikes, the same, pretentious, handsome fool I knew
in seventh grade. His hand—a baby's garment,
grown paler on the line, where water had blown from it,

his eyes clean and white around brown circles centered in deep black.
His hands and eyes are steady. There is a willow, actual,
rakes and hoes converging where the brown grass
surges upward in a trunk: he has been pruning
to save his passage to Old Prague. Roman Catholic,
self-exiled pod, he won't take root, the work
that he is doing unnecessary, time has not left us wanting

common topics. I had heard great things of him
and came here anyway, looking behind me as I cut through
cropped lawns—*dreamed him on straw mats by frozen windows,*
bony fingers on a grocery list in Pidgin Czech. He mimed
a wizened man's atrophy against a scrim, banged rattles
and waved banners over cobblestones, lured passersby
beneath street-lamps where his face frightened invisible sparrows

from his mouth for his gloved hands to clutch and coddle.
He smiles, asks me why I cannot get away,

the bastard knows that I am frayed,
afraid of daylight, scribbling nonsense on scraps
of paper bags and restaurant checks on my mother's sofa.
I keep scrap paper company. Spring bitters on the hinges
of his lashes—one flickers from his rubbing fingers, whistles:

he goes into the streets at dark, howls at dogs
and chatters in confusion at the moon who spares
no influence on him.

Tonight, I'll scrawl your life
into lines, prune sentiment, and then arrange
what has been left before I slip you
in between the cold can and the empty.

APTITUDE

My sprained hand lunged between the pleather seats,
probing through the chilly mints, paper napkins
and metallic pouches filled with ketchup for the last buds
of the dope. Karen slapped her palms against the steering wheel,
furry circle throbbing to The Cure. She lit her cigarette,
jerked her neck, blew smoke-knots through her pinched sideways
spout of lips: lilies of ash turned their petals at the window
but would not fly through. Valerie, laughing maniacally,
screeched teachers' names, followed by lewd, imagined acts.
I gulped back a Schlitz: forty-nine bucks for SAT's=
1 oz. of Maui Wowie. Husky snort preceded hiccups

and my groan. I saw long lines of wedding guests
as I crawled beneath their seats, untangling lines
of blue and rose-pink fairy lights drowned in plastic terraces
of wedding cakes, their endless pink champagne. Another year
without those scores. A few joints to make investments back,
with surplus left to toke. Then, the zip-loc baggy broke.
Seven, the next morning: hung-over crowds surround
the round, Formica tables to have their monikers
checked off. My pipe, Miss Francine, imbedded
in my thigh. I stared at abstract planes, and laughed.
Big numbers spun between my temples, ants frenzied

by a storm. Karen sat across the cafeteria, her eyes
lowered to the pages after—Valerie was someplace
certain in her graphs. I squinted. What would virginity be
when it was someone else's bag? Oh boy. Deluded
like the rest that we were safe, and bright. Pencils
scratched black eggs into clumps of frail blue circles,
over volleyball and beer splashed through the summer

of sprinklers, cars racing the wind, but then her east was green
beneath dark rain. Valerie smoking hash in some café,
the *Samothrace* winging heavily through smoke to her
as I clambered down the buckling staircase to the room

that I had risen from to start away for life among intelligence
and drink. My mom stared at me sideways, picking at her lip,
my father ambled toward me, mumbling then the awkward
bleating of bad news: I knew four different girls
named Karen. I listed off alternatives, reminding Dad
how he had always thought the Bailey twins
were one Marianne. There was no Marianne.
Drumming my hands against the plywood panels—
silver thumb-tacks piercing poster corners,
the stoned-through-algebra and love-poem girl—
and I could not transform those bones to hers.

DRUNK TANK, LATE SEPTEMBER

The Queens don't come out in the cold. Makeshift tourniquets
grow loose around your wrists. Between green bars, you see
the kid in green fatigues tapping his palm against his forehead,
muttering of wombs, punter's swindling dowries
from the mayor's satchel, snatch. He knows all about it,
pal o'mine: guards whisper your offenses between sips
of lukewarm Joe. You'd suck on his elbows for the fumes
of hooch that might seep out. Across the hall, a locker

holds your belt and smokes. Your granny knelt on corn pellets
in potato closets for sassing back. And you—what now?
A cot with rows of socks tucked into balls like woven snails?
A calmness doled to you from Dixie cups, a certain love?
The kid twists circles, fog cats wrap his feet.
You grin, then move your mouth another way.
Your wallet lived lives free of you, last night
you peeped at it inching out, that sly worm,

snickering from its leather lips. You squashed it flat
with one greased boot, then knelt down, weeping,
tearing at your scalp. A whinny for the lucky
horses lost, Fibberboo and Geezer, ballooning in your socks.
One quick finger to your eye, and life clicked
silent in its pouch. Plato of last call, you can't drown
ghosts of love. Between the green faces his gummy
Polaroid grinned. Wiggling, hung like a bunny,

how could your lip tremble for such a fool? You nuzzle
your strained shoulder and you retch. If he comes tonight,
bruised, repentant for your wrongs, don't take him in.

Crawl at nothing now, not bail, nor his green eyes.
Rain pounds circles in the dust, kids chattering
like geese. The leaves are gold. He will not come.

THE REPORT OF THE HUMUNCULUS

I am crouching near the Iowa river: cracked clay
leading to the ramparts of gray rock where fossils
of porifores lie, ridged like stone zucchinis that, when cracked,
reveal tapered cylinders of crystal fruit. Andy brought me here to watch him
fish,
but I picked among the stones to search out what the builders
of the river bridges left behind. Under one flat stone,

a hairy black spider with quill-like legs stared up at me
with many eyes. Every stone I see now holds a spider
underneath it. There is something in between my shirt
and skin, my knees and pants, my socks and feet. The sky
is filled with robust spiders dropping on my neck. This is the river
where John tricked me with his dying not to leave him. This is the river
I come to when I'm suffocating in the prairie, locked in poems:
I remember the bottle first. It is my nature to forget an empty bottle.

*Boston, 1963. My imagined mother poured
Madeira from green hips and wicker skirting,
hummed, picked at the wick of the taper. Dripped charred wax
around the lips of the bottle, welded the candle there,
her cracked hand beside the flame: dark shoulders lurched
over the straight-backed chair, dove into the water-
stained rings and speckled plaster of the ceiling. A former*

*candidate for my father had plumped and smoothed
four squared-off pillars of orange clay, huddled them
drunkenly against each other, litanies of cuneiform
nonsense wedged into their faces. They caroused*

*atop the mantel with the shrugged-off ribbons, below
the replica mariner's map, its quadrants inked-in
with thin blues and pinks, its green waters boiling
around the curved neck of a triton opening its fang-parted lips
to smile. In the dirty oven's window, the watery petals*

*of the flame petted at four blue squares of Boston darkening
on the cardigan arms of soused, folk-singing lettermen
swinging their steel-stringed Ovarious to the T: pummeling
into and around the white-globe of a lamp, scampering down
the sticky steps, their horrid voices lifting up through
creaking branches—worn, creased lungs of garbage bags,
cotton spooks hung by nooses of shoelace—blowing in*

*as she flicked her cigarette against the wind and rocked.
Old men had sung to make her smile, before her body
drew itself into itself, potato wincing under salt,
and young men came to it: the Cuban dishwasher
sliding his Polaroid contract of matrimony across the jimmied counter
of Mrs. Applesauce's novelties, the sculptor whose only kiss
had been that awkward, glazed Stonehenge without a clue
as to the movement of the heavens. Then, the business student*

*who doodled pugilists on napkins as the two of them murmured
their uncertainty into fences, houses, doors (never quite inside):
a gang of sons in baseball hats sweeping their little sisters
up the walk, with the shadow of their arms hovering above
the blur of curling hair and bows, polite and intelligent chatter
rising from their straight, white teeth like chimes
struck with a mallet against the rims of wine-glasses:*

*aligned on a tabletop, water poured in each at intervals
to mimic perfect-pitch over red and white gingham tablecloths
at The Ratskeller, or Your Father's Moustache. And then, they sang
with all the reverence of their fellows: The "Kumbayas,"
The "We-Shall-Overcome," slumming Brahmins
and their wild-oats shedding guilt as their spines
swayed with gin and they sang ideally on the edges
of their practical. He fumbled, moist-eyed, for her hand*

*beneath the tables. His hand: a little wet, the cuff frayed
from too much bleach, his fingertips bruised with ink,
from grocery-bags absorbing all their oils, the paper-cuts
of student moonlighting. He tries to push her to the stage,
but she squirms free, smirks sarcastically into her napkin,
watches his wide grin as he laughs, pressing her mouth
into compatible positions. The jokes that he coughs out
have a ring to them, simplicity: imagination*

burdens this world with too much hurt. Snow had fallen

*on his ears, melted to his cap as he leaned into the buzzer,
his chin clamped to his curled lapels. She clicked
across the floor, rubbing the tensed blue rivers
of her wrists together, and she sang faint lines of melody,
pure and bright, like light seen through a window from the street,
incapable of heat beyond the frosted ovals of its glow.*

*Or perhaps, he stared out
at the spot-light's edge, and watched it turn the brick
black with its absence, nodded as she smiled at him, reached out
to pat her hand, and kept his hand there, on it
as she smiled into the light, and there was what he had:
the night-club's darkened air cut through with one bright
beam of light in which the dust and beer-vapor and smoke collided,
edded, bounced and struck, at last, the solitary singer,
perfectly closed off from the crowd inside a circle, bent, and silver.*

From this, I was never born. Here. Here is the man that I know
that I will leave. Here is the river I blame. This is the hand
that brought me to the heartland: how I hate it. It waves
at him. It covers itself with dust and clay that I stir
into the river, balanced with the upraised moron of my left.
When we climb the tall grass to the car, it is the hand

that points out the long, thick injured pike
drifting in the shallow tributary. I am not drinking why is
everything so focused on this grasp? It doesn't bother me
that everywhere I turn the rain brings us closer
to the quartz carcass of the ancient reef. It bothers me
that I am not ten fathoms underwater, gazing up
at sharks like zeppelins woven from teeth, striped red and blue,
all cartilage and swallow. It bothers me that as I drown here
anyway, ten thousand ammonites aren't squirting
past my head, their tendrils dragging
from whorled hulls of shell. I know what it is
to be alive by only senses and instinct. I know what it is
to be jealous of the lone assassin. It always hurts,
because it knows it's filled with bones.

MEXICO, MAINE

He had rearranged the stones. His gray hair, the granite wall blurred with the sky, the paper mill, those round mountains. High winds blew the stink away, south, toward Rumford. Saturdays, he hesitated over me, hands clenched by mine, against satin sheets and a faux Navajo blanket—I lunged forward at his body, drew knots with my ankles and his ankles. He worked at home, ditched

sushi, raves, amphetamines, three weeks' tips
crammed in his shaving case, drove twitching clear of LA.
“When Michael died...”

His mother called. He rolled
his eyes, poured beer and grabbed his crotch, holding the receiver to his shoulder with his ear. My fingers sparked static on the bent ridge of his spine. I watched him
clench his toes, eyeing tins of spice he should replace. Then,
he hung up, pulled me down, told me how slow dying
could be without his voice. Oh, great, I thought,

it's always this: I nodded. I knew my place. I knew
that my body would give way beneath a memory. He went on.
Dwindling slipped his interest. A choir welcomed his thin tenor,
clapped tambourines at snow. The infected
in the hills sopped up his famous gravy with fresh bread.
He built his wall around the mobile home, gathered accounts

and watched his hills light with autumn.
Did I want a lift back home to Portland? His eyes
were coffee beans, he called me "Pup." Instead, we drove
north to a brook shadowed by a stone bridge. Feathers
of white water, jagged cliffs and spruces traced by frost,
and I looked down: I saw speeding water through a gold day,

twenty years before. I did not tell him
that I saw the older children flap their arms, squeal at minnows
that squirted through their toes. My father on the shore, my mother
holding her hair together from the wind with her chaffed hands.
I did not tell him that the rocks propped in that brook were flecked

with iron pyrite, or that I scratched for pin-sized fossils
that surfaced on the faces of the rocks marked like paper money
with its veins, segmented husks, salt-sized rings
that might have been a mollusk swimming down. Those eyes.
If he could have pushed

me in, held my head against the lichen, made something clear—
but he could not. He stood stock still as I turned toward the car, his hands
blue against the wooden rail, stood still and watched new sheets
of ice break off, slice toward him, leaning from the bridge.

II.

BENDER

I.

Crumbs of ice slide underneath the sill;
snow hounds the coast, flags frozen to their poles.
Wings scratch the glass. Seeds rattle, like the dancing bean,
and hiss: warblers startle, snap at Bender's hands
hunting the beds: hacking apologies at shadows.
Lips on cold ghost mazurkas.

Green fireflies in dark grass, lake water
philosopher, autumn contemplation, beating his thoughts.
Bog mummies wrapped in marsh frogs, their fingers ivory whistles.
Their parted lips contain red eyes: black enamel backs
of June bugs before they blur and twirl away. Phallus poking out

of oiled hands, brushed free of specks. Fly motionless
in dust and grease on glass. The thawed seeds sprout
as Bender snores: abstract and secret, absorbed
into memory. Swallows dip and pick up shreds
of tattered fruit above his bed as he is waking. The sun sets
light on the crease of his body. The clock flits past, dragging its cord

in lasso formation, chases an egg dropping from its mother.

He sniffs: suspicious businessmen are grateful for his mouth
and the lending library. The caravan of love surrounds his tent
and fans his feet while he is snoring, dreams
of arctic lust, complete with penguins playing violins
on slabs of blubber propped on cut-glass trays. He licks
the ear-lobe of a chilly sailor—Hello, sailor!—but then,
the seals growl, and he half-remembers walking through
the bar the night previous. Leers and poking. The old man
with his sad history in gin: gym instructor, seventh grade.

Called him "faggot" before thirteen-year olds
in sweats glistening beside the medicine ball. The glaciers fill
with cages, gnashing fangs and slippery skins. He rides
a swallow south as the menageries of sleep
are fed the fingers of imaginary men.

II.

We are of the dead. Teal-eyed man leaning on wainscoting,
reaching for the ladle that I angle clean beneath a gush
of lukewarm water. I could crawl under, should have soured,
cider left to air. I should have scribbled nasty poems
forcing those eyes out of my clenched eyes,
folded stained pages into drawers. I opened to the jerk.

We are despicable, seasons within themselves,
never seen again. His ghost sees within the wheel
a young boy crying, "If you stay, I will surrender!" Such tenderness
for parasites:

water around the edges of ceramic lenses,
painted with tomatoes, flecks of egg: strokes
that we can't shake clear. Beneath, clouds covering
a warm lake, cataracts of chilly silver
rinsing all trace of food away.

The plates dry, as light fills in the moon, as air fills in
the blood. Darkness completes us:
a crow caw on deep water,
the sparrow within its own voice.

III.

I don't know why my ma and dad
was open, I know where every screw and pulley is. I give
lollipops to any animals
that I won't eat. I use the skins. I use my hands
when liquor doesn't bring me into bed. I make that bed
each morning, like I know I will come back to sleep there,

which I do. The three clocks flash on the hour
within seconds of themselves. I waited until midnight,
dashed for plugs. I'm grateful for the digital display,
for frozen corn, instant oatmeal and canned gravy.
That is what I know we fight in wars for.

I want to be your friend. Shotgun.
Beer-bong. Roach. Climb out onto the fire escape with me
to watch me piss into the mailbox where my money goes.
See those stars? Their lights on my pupils
are older than the wheel. Don't touch my ass

that way. This way. Like this. Just once. You there?
I'm not a queer, I had this coming. If I could hold
my car inside my arms at night, wrap
my legs around her engine, then
I would not need a human hand, a voice
to call me to my plate. To remind me
of my duty to the boss.

IV.

Pitchers of beer trail towards beds, tilt
on taxi mud-mats across town:
 you matador.
Fingers wrinkling in steam,
through a jungle curtain, twisting
in bending light. Shudders. Reads.
Pets cat and throws it sideways.
At the bed's legs, pack and matches.
He snaps pages. Cup of water, guarding
evaporation. Hunger toward the window,
propped open with a bottle,
brown glass. Wind off the melting ice
sips him piecemeal into morning, and he,
so happy to be mist, cat-like smiles, then scatters.

V.

His hands take rest against the slopes:
the Matterhorn, Parnassus, yes,
Olympus, yes: the Pilsner glass.
Talking confidently to the face
half-turned away: wiry runt, well-hung
for something twice his height. Rum-maniac,
whistling through tooth crag: smells like a scowl among the sons.

Ms. Marvella licks her palms
and slaps his ass, half-flesh,
one quarter sequin, sending him
upstage: a shaft of light,
the smarmy replaced with fractured sounds,

a fish-net knee. Foil flakes and a nut-crunch
laugh of pain, scarlet and azure feathers

finally given voice, the temporary
football half-back that he had been
dismissed completely. The crowd murmurs
within him. Quarterbacks place violets
between his toes and then their cussing
fathers lace up skates or cleats,
slip awkward ankles into ruby shoes.

VI.

He cherishes tiny kittens, everything pink,
white as the Xanex that he swallows,
daiquiri moustaches on his lips. He is a jade and chrome
smorgasbord of powders, cock-rings,
ben-wa balls prolonging aped procreation.

When his first beard formed,
seen only at angles in light,
he aimed weasels at his grandpa's
woodchuck holes, carried cisterns
of well water to eiderdown flocks.

Within the stern rim, soft mirrors
framed her, rising at him,
faint blushes, bright eyes swimming
to surface. Night. Blue liqueurs. Gold boas.
Promise opening at his thighs: now,

each haughty poodle laps kibble from his palms.
Coats lean against the glare of this boudoir.
Ferns swing beneath
the wooden fan, blowing
a snowy, Cuban air around. No knife
can cut the boys stamping in that barn away.

VII.

Marinated limes in plastic cups. Piss-hot
backwash drafts. Glass squares glued to Styrofoam
moon: red and blue snow, trails of glittering stars.
Blur of gaunt bodies in leathers and satin.
Rhythm hides track marks and black eyes, nipples bitten
off by detoxing junkies in seizures of passion.

Bartender quizzes him
on his date of birth, a stool
scraped away from the poker screen
echoes his mother's sharp voice
calling him back, off from lips

where a cigarette sticks with dried spit: the lieutenant snoring

in the corner of the dance floor,
curled behind a dented garbage can.
He shakes the man, checks his wallet
for breathing. *If it's dead, I am the last*
man seen near it. The filter peels from the mouth, it growls,
snatches at his crotch, chomps his belt,
and pulls him down.

VIII.

Staring at the octagon of stainless steel
in which the mathematics of an athlete's arms
are frowning. Elbows the plunger through his shirt. Graffiti
on lime green. The echo of bazaar
behind the phone. Barometric pressure
admiring gravity with fingers,
glances, breaths, ozone flock
within the shadow of the greatest wing.

Breathing lead feet, growling, groaning,
grows, each leg an oak, a Grecian urn,
a bristle standing in the handles
of old-fashioned combs.
The cave fills with the bellows
of a hundred wheezing bats
in the screech map of their pulse chorale.

A barkeep strokes
his scalp with nicotine palms, swipes
the glass back. Bender skids black-ice,
shrinks, scattering constellations
of blood as he belches: *You are*
an aspirin, slick-thighed and gorgeous dwarf, but I
am King of the Monkeys! His hands: bruised
bee-hives. Pisses on the tires of his car. He's Justice.

INDIANPIPE

As I lean, I catch my mother's eyes—*there, on the water,*
filled with storm—but she has gone from there when I
have focused on my own eyes on the surface. Still. Still,
while leaves are passing, chutes bump forward through it
to the grate, the deep and corrugated tube. The crabapple
shakes its gnarled arms into the wind, lets its blossoms

scatter, and its green fruit drop. The milkweed is a blizzard
driving through the willow's broom, but I can see it,
here, underneath my eyelids, seeping like milk out of its husks,
like milk that has been poured into cold and bright blue
water. A cloud of mountains sails, and then is superceded
by black circles, ovals, then a gash of white light
that splits the hills that all day have been sleeping quietly
under spots of yellow swarming silently among themselves

like polliwogs among the reeds, the eggs that they have just abandoned
crumpling nearby. The wind rifles through my hair to check
the roots for what it is that I am thinking. A black Labrador

trots toward the stone foot-bridge arched above the brook:
it stops, puzzled, sniffing at the barricade of low-tide
whiff of sea that has risen from the slow, polluted water.

*Spooky chum, we should be smoke, something loose and trusting
of the wind. How easy it would be to climb that knoll
and rock our limbs against the dark, for dark is coming. When it falls on us,
we could make wheels of light and rushing bolts of metal
lunge against the ground, fill the narrow paths
with arms and childish whistles, cats full and bristling with the ions of their
curiosity.
We could dress in the failing colors planets are*

*when we edge against the current, into the bright red pagoda
buckling under all the smiling men, scooping popcorn
into paper horns. I can see it: in the gallery, in the dark, a spotlight
hits the curtain of a faded moss brocade: your top-hat spins,
its flint trim sparks against the alligator skin of some lunk-headed
changeling oozing from his box. Outside,*

*the pens are growing silent. The dog-faced boy is jealous
of your truncated tail. He knows by how high the moon has risen
that inside this box-car, two luminescent canines shine
beneath the intent eyes following the flame-red cockatiels up, up, rising
as they always are, through a thin, silk-lined cylinder—a fat bear
Charlestons.
Someone drops a key...
but you have detoured, poke and paw at something in the rocks.*

HARE MURDERS POOKAH

The spirit of the rabbit goblin swells above the glen,

flattened by his shadow. Squirrels
lean back to shade their eyes with paws
hung stuck with nuts.

I hear the wolves
in the black coal of the gingko
struck by lightning. I hear the human children
berserk and chastised by the thunder. I crouch, naked, concerned
with none of it.

Crows cringing on the boughs: smoke
from his bonfire eyes,
tangling in the ringlets of his burning mane. The dawn horse dead.
Blinking and nibbling

his muddy mouth. His knee knuckles
pawing the bees for clover. In disguise, I ask
for lessons in his size. He leans,
a horizon. I listen days,

anchored from the velocity of his breath. Last moon,
I crept slowly—I close my hand around the feather
of his mouth, cannot squeeze my fingers
close enough. He crawls across my forehead:

a flea, a hiss, a bristle's tickle in my nose, down
the cavern of my ear. Cross-eyed, following foot-falls

in his skull. Yes, damselfly, silverfish,
my songs are as the foxglove of your eyes. The great horn wails.
The mountains thrum with insects: To his mouth! His mouth!—waved
inside...

He yawns. Heaving, he falls, and nothing small
is without sustenance. Spiders fold, drown in
lakes green with his teeth of hammered copper.

The murder in the hemlocks enraptures the sparrow,
whose wings are rooted in the wind...

LITTLE HORSE

The bench slats press against her cheek, a cake
of white spit drying to the photograph of Courtney Love,
cracked ring of Salem Lights 100's around the scattered
credit cards and notes pulled from her wallet
as she slept. All night, the skies were humming with her head:
matted grass tangled in briar, the colt's nostrils
quivering in wet air, her neck webbed with blood
the fence's bramble tangled line had mapped
since her breakfast gallop shattered
into broken bone and tattered mane, legs ignorant
of barriers. The sun cast its own shadow

cold crept in, wedged a shard of light
into her snagged eye. A brown scar of road

rose beyond the fence that kept her racing people
from the wind, unhindered by the hills. She whistled
a hand steady in its strengths to ride the weaknesses
of men, cried her horses into running
as dawn drenched the mountains in its blues. He's gone,
she starts to cry, trying at a match, then another,
but it won't stay lit. So easy living in the car
before her father cut the wires, hid
the clicker in the couch while everyone, frantic to watch
Friends, complained. She needs someone passing by

to stab her in the gut to ease the pain, that he'd come
into her mouth and ask her for more money to prove love.
A hooker kicks a collie licking at her boot: "Don't touch me, dog!"
she howls, kicking it again, chasing after, and again. The white girl
screams out to her, but cannot move, and the whore snarls
at the thing, blue nails hooked into its jowls, snaps
at its nose and spits it out, rising in triumph as it limps off
down an alley, dragging a fly-strip from its haunches. She sees
the flat eyes and the purse. Ambles up, wiping blood
from her mouth with three twenties that she unfolds
from her ravaged tits. How'you, girl'fren? She lies down,
too sick to stab at her. *My mom's a bitch. Nobody loves me.*

IMPATIENCE

Owls pout in the rafters of the milking barn, but you
are on the roof, snatching lightning bugs,
the nebula due north that shimmies above the stagnant pond.
When you were just that size, your grandpa says, there was

another boy that turned off the blankets of his mother's pleas and went
outdoors when no one in the village dared to face the wind
frozen to cat-tails and white charts of frost. Mocked the leaping fish
whose mouth snapped open on the air and fell clattering

to the ice, a tarnished copper ring. You don't buy that sack.
Inside your palm, crossed out with bramble
burrs, a dying firefly glimmers green, illumines

the bits of it that do not give off light. You close your hand, release
the plink into the jelly jar. You can't believe that some kid stood out
on that uncertain ice, breathed a block of fog that branched
and stiffened—crystal snagging crystal—quickly carved it into a man,
or man-sized replica of man, and crawled inside.

RESORT

I.

*"Life, friends is tedious, but not without redeeming moments
of despair: remembrance, a diamond when one works,
a detriment to play.*

II.

~~Tongue navigates the curving
of my ear—if you blow into it, the tobacco barn might burn—first, graffiti—
see wet names spelled in cursive there—then the planks themselves,—~~

~~immolating quicker than print—quicker than the dry wings of wood lice—
scrambling no place in the pulp—silence in no company to please, no body—~~

~~at war with mine for friction. I cry out, a golden bird with its perfect
babies eaten. My seven sharpened pencils, carefully aligned—
Peppermint. I know where it is. I know, but do not follow—~~

*Nights, the swooning busboys dance with bus-tubs on their thighs.
Dark eyes, quick as foxes at squealing horns. If they dawdle
during rushes with girls, cigarettes, playing hangman with menu crayons,*

*let them be. They are, at seventeen, all I need to see beyond the thinning
eyelids of the summer. Fine knives not blunted by intellect,
or bitterness, dried sorrow. Each boy a beauty, each chum a sigh*

*upon their downy lips. Every Adam's apple a mystery to kiss.
Bodies why those bodies were made for them, the box they're in.
Blindly they dress for their marriages, to lose what they love.*

*They punch each other's arms, calling faggot endless exile, drown
their gentleness in whisky, stiffen for the great dance with the other
marionettes, who won't surprise them. This is my body,*

*in a dim yellow cone. Wind ripples their silence.
Cracked lobster traps, frail as wasp nests woven from lint, tobacco,
frayed paper, huddle by steep moorings. Ocean whisks white sand gray,*

*soothes the uselessness of language as carpenters whittle
animals from potatoes, apples. Shallow water: boys laugh, shouting
out undertow: they think that noise fastens happiness to them,*

*bright shimmering jackets. They are unaware of grief, or the deft sea
erasing their trail, leaving mirrors, no certain return. They do not know
that sorrow wells in children, bruising them from their centers*

where angels clamor to leave, and, occasionally, surrender to be named.

*and when I lean down, there is nothing better,
all this torn away, and the felt-tip tearing black tatters from the napkin—*

~~*at the heart of a mountain, three miners humping a boy torn from the creek,*~~

~~*promised whiskey as he is heaved onto their shoulders and off
through dried yucca on top of their donkeys—and he likes it, you know,
the way that his body gets older with them sliding inside him,*~~

~~*the canvas—speckled with paint—that they tossed under him
clean. He eyes the tins of corned beef, suet, boiled potatoes, tack—
Summer of whiskey that he will want more of. Hard fingers fumbled*~~

~~at his anklebone, but he got it, finally, which is good,
it was wedged between immobile stones as the wolves stopped their baying.~~

The moon—

you keep talking. The bartender slaps
a shot of brown schnapps down on the poem.
The desert bleeds black into brown
into green. Oh, look—ferns! You tickle
my ear, ask me about football.
I am nothing: drunk men slap me
with their marriages. Look at me, man:
see the lonely graffitist scratching urinals
for fragments to fondle. Finger me against
a maple bleeding sugars for the bees to lick clean

with their bee-tongues. Someday,
neither acquaintance nor convenience,
nothing of this body that men nibble at
like fish. Tenderness will bloom,
sponges dropped in basins. Use me up
after a brief affection fantasized, but do not, please—
no closer. Speck is someone that you loved
but could not suck. Do you think
this is a gift, concern? Even the bartender,
twisting cloths in tumblers,
asks my situation, nodding sadly
as he eyes me, up and down, down and over.

III.

At five, I rise to serve you. The grasses leave
my white sneaks drenched. Styrofoam lips: coffee leaps
to imperfect me. Shadows streak in blues and greens, composing
on the lawn's mown nap. Tables with parasols: twenty men
in tank-tops sipping Long Island Iced Teas out of paper straws,
smoking cigarettes, blowing smoke-rings at mosquitoes

lighting like a psoriasis upon their arms. The sipped flinch.
I fetch: popcorn, freshened drinks, smile although sweat salt
stings my eyes shut, bitters the corner of my mouth. I bear
your winks, boorish bear-faux growls, gimlet bus tours of the streets
before The Horror. My teenage dream: nursing a noble lover
to his edge. I brush against you, crawl into your beds

to be swayed asleep. "He's a dear, young thing," you say
as if I were a scratching finger slipped into a handshake:
surprising, but not rare enough to keep. Your flannel face.
Rumpled in tuxedo, hands full of nickels. You are no virgin
at breakfast, tapping rye toast on the saucer, eggs
gathering crumbs. Rum dyes rosehip into your eyes, bent by slight

things, orchid and giggling, orchards of fruit you'll never taste:
strength blooming in the trousers of boys with eyes like bees
humming between blossoms. There are no jokes
complaining of this matter in your talk. That meat's
a dog, rabid Fido, furry nail pissing a circle around this fig tree
from which swallows flee, this beardless errand boy. You are

brutal to the balls, I limped from you aware of my limitations. Between
hands,
the worn coins sing: Your feet end where mine begin. My voice is rain,
your voice glides underneath the surface like an oar. Your mouth
is dry. Wrestle down my body with your eyes.

BROCADE

So—who is he whose light has been what beckons me?
Who kisses in the doorway where the shadow ducks?
Who carries forth the forest where the wild beasts spin,
snatching at the twirling carcass of the wind that sucked
the blessed flame from me when I was nothing more
than a glitter of a peacock in my mother's fan
folded like a razor-shell inside her music-box?
The deed that I would do, is do him in:

tear stock that is my heart to bid the cricket spring,
set fire upon the floe to roast the hurried wind
and melt the sorry ice that hinges my imagining.
I speak to nothing. Nothing watches from the broken moon—
the animals fall silent in its curving light—
be still, now, hush. Hear him? The starving lightning stands
shrugging off the soot of what the forest was
from his crooked arms, sputtering green now in the dusk.

He crawls to me—he's crying. What would I do to him?
The peacocks hop along the branches of the silent trees.
Their tufted feathers twitch above their black, unblinking eyes.
Their tapered bodies quiver, their sweeping feathers spread,
cold, embroidered azure. Blink on, iridescent eyes!
Staring straight at me—unyielding as a million whirring clocks—
be still. Now watch the lightning eat out of my hand.

WHERE TEA HAS BROUGHT ME

I want to hold my hand up to the sun,
just close enough to light. I live in fear of fire,
but fire, if you take human form, I know
who I would beckon, storm into flesh, whose bones

that I would ask you cage: voice, insight, and if
you leave him here I will not fear the shadow,

or my age, but weep with gratitude for the hours
that we would share. I watch red shadows fall,

from his fingers, arms, hands, bright touching
bright. The moon is but an answer to his light,
for this man that I have feared: his power,
and his gentleness. His voice. His grace.

No season to the touching of his face.

III.

MALT

I know how far the ice should go—
I know how far—I know because

it thinks like me—I think it smells like
me—
because I fell—because my hand
has fallen—on the snow—because my
hand
has fallen—through the snow—
in a hole—shaped like my hand—my hand: scratching—
at the ice—
that smells of me—tobacco—piss and puke. Comforting odors—
being mine—my hand scratches—crossing ice—beneath the frozen snow—I
know how far.

I am water—growing still—I will not need to know—My hand
spreads—
and my body—opens—like the dark does—like the dark does—when my eyes
—

close my hand. Close.
Close my hand—before the ice—begins.
Fingernails
wince. Cheap beer-can
snap-tops. Angry gazes
at the pampered lot. Bats
scratch at panes
of winter light. The east is blue,
if that's the east.
Fingertips.
Charcoal. Tar. Bruised.
Why my body stops.
On stone.
Drywall.
Blocks
of cold cement.
All night. Night.
There's nothing there.
Knuckles have been
bad before. What put themselves
against them now? Trees tap.
Those last leaves
won't drop off. Don't stay
too long: your friends are
underground.
Crates of yellowed pulps.
Wagon wheel
leaning on the butcher's
case
cornered in the barn. Black piano
hacked apart: tangled
strings, gap-keyed. Who

put their fingers there?
Who knew the chords?
The sounds
it must have made,
against the hammer
and the hammer. Making
pledges:
smooth necks, holiday
cologne.
Prep-boy
loom-fresh linens brushed
against my lip. Biting
at the buttons, but I can't
get in—not to their skin,
not to their
skin, but through—
their bodies
smooth
against my hands. What
I would do
to skip the kiss and climb
inside, see
from those
eyes
and make
away—
north—
to be under it—and raise
those other fingers to the
stars—blue. A blue
in bruises. Black. Forever—everywhere I turn—
fields—just frozen—with no land
beneath. I would know then how
I had to sleep. Tiny things halt
early here. The ground
pulls
structures down
into itself. Narcissi—
daffodil—sunflower along a road
by clear—and freezing—water. I would have been
—
beautiful—
not
this end. Bone
without marrow—knotted in concert—
swinging sticks. Gray cloud—
black and furrowed snow. The moon's

wheel. Closest star—spins from
absolute center—beginning—falling—rising.
Through and into. Bearded hemlock bends
to ice: listens.

Listens for buried summer, and that
season's

screeching children.

What a liar I am!

Nancy growler! Hand-licker! I know—
ghost is thick in me. I know
what the afterlife is like: its smells of burning pipes

—

clanking radiators—the hiss
of sleeping boys. Whispers—frightened glances
when I drink milk
from a common bottle
I am careful to complete. I broke—

the last
panes—

with my fists. Flashing—
voices hauled me off: gurgle—
over frozen snow.

Begging

back to school, I paraded my remorse. Brothers
said I didn't need rum
to have some fun. Black lawn-care bags in window-
sills puff. Suck. Those

inclined to fixing things
gave up. Taste it—

my tiny body blows to human size, grows by
fathoms. The planet lies

beneath my flapping
wings, an echo
of my singing. A thin shadow of a man appears.

White

light crowds around me like a gang
that will not speak

and then the shadow
shuts the metal door.

I
scratch along the floor—I know how far. I know—for the salvaged cup that I
had dropped.

VIRGIN

November. Rumors of weather, and this: the first genuine storm,
smothers the town in snow: trees break, or hang low. Icicles
falling like chimes when I wake to find my shirt drained
of its humorless ghost of water. My fingers. Dull surprise. I had burned

them hanging wet sleeves over the radiator grate: I was only one
watching. Steam imagined him: a rippled lumberjack
over frost-ferns etched on glass. The heat-pipes belch, bang
cutlery on pots deep in the privates of the building. I suck

my fingers: they taste like pennies. I go outside, I'm not sure
why. I step out into murmurs, my skin kissed by shocks, as if
my body had fallen asleep. The wind faces me down: the ground
is getting big now, pink clumps pelting, packs of nothing

perching in lindens to pounce as I pass under. The conifers
wag their white beards, lamps skirted with splinters. No—
sea monkeys, a haze of moon slipping down into the turning
earth. A smashed cassette's guts glitter and twine the branches

tapping my lit window: stars open their barnacle fans
in the fronds. Rotting animal stench suspends in the fields,
stink-mountains freeze, stall over the paper mills. Wood-smoke
slips from chimneys, warns the wakeful to be glad.

The cataract

of change has worn my name from my face, as lichens and snow
eradicate the history of stones. Will you go, laddy, go? As all
my fixed stars have, quenched in sea, leaving me landlocked
among a host of bones and wreckage from dark weather. I am

weary of the games of tides and currents, pray the hours of light
to vanish with the day. I could sit and type a deconstructive paper
on my life, liberties taken to wife at cost. Lord, I'm lost. Thought
myself a box, swallowed the keys, digesting my own prison. Ripe.

Molting. I cross my legs and I cross my fingers: it's all bad luck.
The blizzard hisses, tatters of letters settle on my scalp, weld
to my hair, burn my scarred hand a moment before melting. Answers?
I work slowly toward sleep. I smoke. Ashes smudge into my skin

while smoke and breath spread through the phone-lines. I flower
among the shredded art: I am smallest, facet of a fading star. By morning,
I will know the dead by heart.
I bend my knees to stamp for an approaching rain.

FIGURES IN THE MUSEUM

Wind on wood, and wood in motion. Branches cracking
a green sky hurried with soot. Gray bodies hunched in coats
lug books, heads bent into their collars, battered by a school
of quince, kumquat and persimmon
foddered goldfish. Bred to fall. Our feet ache through our boots
on red brick. Hay and manure

are what we breathed yesterday. In the corner of the barn, the sun
splinters a cracked-glass web. Our talking makes a fire
of the fall, what is destroyed pieced from remembrance: our eyelids
afterthought, the trickster
wind blows in. We do not touch. We hunch our shoulders, shaking off
our coats. We squeeze our hands. We shake the numb

from them. We were invisible in rain: bees
of stolen sugar. When the sun leaped from the mountain, the great cat arced
and howled. Goats bahhhed and butted their horns
against horns for good reason—if only
bee reasons. Paralysis. Wasps brushed bursting children, scattering flak,
a shattered hand, its bones. The dandelion

shook its white mane into the wind,
but we are inside. Smokestack fractions: a table tipped over
on its top, dead bug legs-up. A Ping-Pong paddle
and a dented ball caught in the twisted net. Cardboard matchsticks
stuck burnt-out in the red-wax puddle wheel

of a stared-down candle. Zee dodges and lunges, blond whip
and spindle, at one taker then another. The painted eyes
follow me. I shake with love: the tarantella of voices, matrimony
of cadence. I watch for the wedding in her mouth. At night, she reads colors
that dance before my eyes like dolls: blues
of gendarmes and ambassadors, a schoolgirl's Sunday pink. She spins

cradles from the loose threads of my socks, the ivory of the elephant rearing from a paper mouse. I reach out to touch them, but my hand falls through. A man trying to comfort a fire. A man can be a bone, a pocket emptied of objects, what is left in the pocket: sweat, tobacco flakes, specks of paper too small to write on. Then, he must speak:

there is no pain within the stream: the salmon have climbed ladders to their heavens in the mountains, where the forest thins to scrubby brush and firs, and the snow stirs a white dust up. Where birches burn and sigh. gilt with afternoon: pillars of shaved alabaster, their branches slender egret wings. Egrets who caught a cloud of dragonflies just drowning, don't care how, as they lean into their images, they bend

I rest here, in the silver parchment's glow. The wood's grain a tundra lined with outcroppings of brush, I could have been there. I could have hidden in the rusted tufts of wolves' grass and grasshopper pox, its dynasties of hull and peeling carcass, waiting for the twins. Mead stirred with elk-bone from the sled-dog's skull. I would have watched them, below the nervous birds pecking at the mice skating

on the weeping mirror of the lake. I would have thrown the stone to fool them both. The gulp that scattered sperm-clouds of tadpoles, invited thinking that the other tried to slay him. I would have watched as they struggled on the bank. I would have watched the yellowed scraps, their wood-knot mouths,

bleach in the sun. Their fingers gnarling with the roots that telegraph rainwater. Let them be eaten by the tree. Let the leaves turn their faces to the sun, the green one and the pale. My eyes are insects skimming silent water: I drop past slits of gills, old souls rolling in cylinders of dark, charading garments. Scales pierce numerals into my fingers. Eels chipping fangs

as they snap at their middles. In these bones, know nothing of the land: how trees shed leaves to nurture earth for seeds, or how mountains are ground into dunes and drift away, melt into glass. Lift from my table, humming fins. I pray that the moon accept these souls within its bell of nectar. Hollows fall. I touch my hands: only ideas, mixed metaphor and pathetic fallacy of synapses that click and catch

faltering dopamine. The windows: pastel stained-glass patterns
in masking tape chalked-over for color. Zee
blowing on her knuckles, wagging them free of sparks, ducking back,
terrified
by the bony animal nosing in the shuttered hearth
for birds, or bones, for blood-soaked scraps of spud peel. The engine
of retired greyhound padding like a spider,

angular, hopping place to place, its iron pyrite claws
ticking against the faded black linoleum. By the door,
a boy with black eyes leans in to shoulder the doorframe: syntony.
Zee a peroxide blur, a wheel, my eyes dilate, spinnerets—

HIYOGI'S BRIDGE

He reaches underneath
the black-feathered belly
of the notorious, egg-pecking
chicken, tapes his hands to hold
the pitchfork. When we speak,
it is uncertainly, of familial
myths, the unexamined threads
of long recited texts:
*Once, a swallow's nest
was burned...my mother
tore...my brother killed...
we have not found him.* We puzzle
through the ground for what
sustains us. He prunes
the flowering plum: the gracile,
sloth-padded buds leaning
on the teal lip of the mouth-blown
cough-syrup decanter in his mother's kitchen
window; blooming, when they bloom,
out of tap water. A boarder,
from Kyoto, built a pine
bridge with a curved railing
of cedar blocks with willow

wicker, across the brook
that bends along the southern edge
of farm. He says that he
had named it for himself, but
I doubt this. A sign remains,
its red paint peeling
in between the grain, the stake
admiring fallen corn, the rippling
oval of the pond upon which
reflected geese arrow, the chevron
of returning. Turkey vultures
circle something by the far
stream's gray and hollow stalks.
I heave the jagged, fragrant mulch,
piggy-back his nieces, hoping to bend
a little toward their shouts
and be asked back. To the grown,
I am unnatural, and mine is not
a body that he would waste
his most trivial remark on.

ELIAS

I saw the kid standing in goldenrod, rose up, shuffled backwards.
Waved him off, squinting at the porch-swing, old toile-painted milk jugs,
swinging spider-plants. He lowered his eyes, black hair snagging
in snapping branches. Slid my hands into my pockets,

hurried away.

Morning. A blur of green and white, a day of falling stems.
I scratched black ridges of walnut, broken
soldiers dove in moss. Fire ants, drops of blood

wriggling on invisible snips of string, crawled across the page.
A nicked fingerprint serrated one within its loops, frayed
scarlet on the paper. A dry day: voiceless. Their mother nodding
down the steps to work. The porch swing squeaked. Newspapers slipped,

great speckled wings of paper scattered. I leaped up
to snatch them into docile, sleeping doves for her. Elias swims
in blood, had to have hid his breathing from his mother as he drove.
We stumbled onto deck to watch the moons. A shadow

*darted up his arm. He said he liked me,
I was normal, not like them. I looked sideways
at his eyes, black moons,*

thin blue rings surrounding them,

*splinters of silver imbedded in their dark. He said,
"My brother is that way." I turned, lit a cigarette, nodded. I wanted
big brother with his furry feet. The rat crawled, sniffing
at his shining hair. Pins of silver breathing*

*slipped from its nostrils. Elias rubbed his fingers on the gray ridge
of its snout. I closed my eyes, cannot find me.
I am scarlet, up finger first, then swiftly to the elbow,
swatting at the bats that batter at your heart.*

*I stood at the door and watched their shadows
sweep over the frozen lake. Elias waved
to see his hand swallow the island; a red ant as big as him
crawled sideways across the dark, flat doll*

*his body was. The glass, against my body, bent. A talon of shadow
swerved from north and scoured Elias into blue—
my paper slapped against the trunk, pressed a hundred cartoon moons
against the bark. A tiny, crimson star blinked in the white.*

LAST DAY FOR WHITE SHOES

I go into my room to hide. Downstairs,
the heavy feet of aunts squeak
across the kitchen floor: it's four o'clock.
The sky is dark, tee shirts glowing blue
beneath shaking trees. The corners
of the vinyl tablecloth whip up, snatching
at dried hamburgers and cups of beer.
A cousin someone from New Jersey
darts across the lawn into the overgrown
hydrangeas: they must be dumb
in that well-dressed, pouting country he is from.
It makes me itch to have these people
in my house. Mom lights a cigarette,
stares weeds into the pitchfork by the fence,
half out of ground. Old people

smell like milk, eat cheese, drink alcohol,
complain. I know that they die, you
know that now. You want to ask. You want
Mom not to laugh and chat at everyone,
tearing at her lip: you want me out, or at least thin
against the joking of the kids. I'm sad

but understand, you need
her help. Her hand and our father's shout
roll the cars away, into their dream of roads,
and rain will want their bodies beneath
those metal hulls, knock to get inside. Your hands paw
at plush fleur-de-lis paper on the bathroom wall,
your eyes flickering in sleep. A comb lies
on the sink, its teeth gummed-up with golden soap,
your hair, still wet, hangs in a bow

across your lip. The night before,
on Mom's knee, in your night-dress
you were weeping. Can I dance?
you asked. Mom shook her head.
You cannot dance, there's so much time
to dance. I know a little more. A girl
could go away. That window, splintered in the pile
of bricks will be extant in the world devoid of me,

or them, and the dead cannot remember dancing.
The moon spills silver light through the silver branches
of the birch. The tool shed creaks beneath the tap, beneath
the tap of rain: inside, lawn-mower, leaves
in plastic bags, rust-spattered trowel, rake: and that porch-light,
its cord frayed behind the rusted rim,
left behind by whatever people
smelled these floors when they were new.

FRIDAY EVENINGS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Rain beads against the windows, this window
painted shut, glass smeared with putty
and the fingerprints of boys
waiting underneath the cartoon curtains
for their fathers. There are suits one wears,
a blue suit, say, and a man's hair,
like a woman's, is combed back,
and frozen. A man can sound like a woman
in her bra before the mirror on Friday nights.

The girls are waiting for a comb
and the baby sitter kneels,
and soothes the tears of snarls away
with promises of coloring,
of the little mirror and powder
of the compact hidden in her nylon book-bag,
and the parents leave, trailed by strong perfumes. Upstairs,
the boys are thinking about Jiffy Pop
and punching one another:
the foil opening like a camera lens
around a timid whistle of white steam.

If they stood still and listened, the crunch
of gravel under tires would hurt, like God,
the way God lives in other houses pulling
the wrinkled fingers of the old through telephone lines;
on television, parents climb into Cadillacs,
never to return. Alone, the girls asleep, the baby-sitter
lights a Marlboro Red, and dials the telephone.
TV dinners bubble, breathing their own bodies

out of ice. They come down stairs in pajamas,
sit around the television set, and peer inside.
The bodies of the people there are only blue and red and green,
porous as cloth woven from a million,
unrelated dots. The babysitter's father
has no thumb. Her brother was
the babysitter once. When he came, it smelled
like burned popcorn.

KID

When crickets killed his frog, he shook.
He understood all things. It is not difficult to drag
his body back to her. He is frightened,
that the herds of animals that mill here in his hand
will scare her off: to love the spider
is to love him, his silky frights. He'll dance
for cake, whistle the clocks to jerk
toward noon. The old man stares intently
at his pen. Nobody that knows sense

without fact can hold him still—
wiggly beavers, fastidious otters
who use stones as tools to crack shells
for food they'll clean before they eat.
When he climbed over the fence, (the catch
of bony arms and legs
swung up over them, then over) he heard
the cars clacking together

across the fields of sting

and stink of goldenrod and bear. The wily
legless body shone. Human beings swallow beer
to make new boys, their heads hurt
from too much knowledge. Of this he is certain:
cube steaks will put hair on your chest,
and “your rules,” old man, “mean nothing
compared to my love of snakes.”

NEW YEAR'S TREE

On All Saint's Day it snowed in Rome, New York;
buried grimy groceries and taverns in a ratty blanket
of scraps and leaves. The yellowed faces in the New York Times
unfolded on the corner. A stork champed a cigar
in the drugstore window. Screw the news, map of scars
inking my back. Bells ringing. Stolen money. Shattered plates.
The scream digests the bright red heart of me. Brave soldiers rallied
at my face all month, freezing my nose, frosting the coke-bottle punts
of my glasses. So, the news-stand filched money from beneath the bathroom
towel,
split four worn bills into ten new “funny” books, one candy bar.

*Bad move. My mother shrieked until I shrunk. Fairy. The phone rang. No
one.*

Nurse Brain-drone. Calm water. A frozen lake. She won't look at me.

Locked up the jewelry. I hid inside the Cadillac, black house:
jerked off, watched winter replicate itself; its hard skin
pure but for the clumsy tracks, my feet sunk deep. The moon's

mouth bit big holes in me: nothing but ice-water leaked
out. By Thanksgiving, she was dead. We ate at her table,

*her estate. I didn't love the animals
we ate, remains, a scent of onions on me.*

We followed in my uncle's new white Caddy, the hearse—
a white wooden church. The Ukrainian priest sang in tongues
old people flapped when they didn't want me hearing. Incense
in the censers numbed me. My suit pinched. Stupid, pale idol

*praying at nothing, poetry.
I'll never thaw at this rate.*

Aunts patting my brave back. Jesus:
blow me. The stone was cut ten years previously.
The names: intact, dates elliptic. Ashes, red leaves, chipmunks.
My cold feet poke at the refuse of the dying year. I look to a sky
puzzled with blackbirds: Christmas will forgive me, I won't get coal
like heartless boys received in Marxist time. Oily black winter sky,

*the neon Revereware man, galloping, galloping...on the balcony
I piss and piss, my glasses fog...*

FREIGHT

The night becomes two giants locking lips, and the train
a string of pearls dragging between their teeth. The cars,
disgruntled beetles, hum behind their headlights,
and as it darkens, disappears,
leaving spheres of luminescence
foraging the swift, blowing sideways
serpents of exhaust. A pulse of cockroach
waddles through gravel
toward wheels, sparking steel
on steel. The groan of weight against the track

emulates sex, admixture of frustration, longing,
wonder, great relief and fear, sounds two fucking giants
would make indeed, or walrus, or the sea,
falling brutally and brutally again against ruins.
They are like lightning bugs

held in the lungs of the ichthyosaur,
as they hold their breath in that long kiss
between the beads. The last strand is pulled along,

the swarm begins to stir, and flows forward, into
and beyond the other...and the man, I cannot tell
whether he stares at me, is motivating me forward
with his head, or if his neck has become stiffened in the chilly air.
I can already feel my lips against his neck,
my fingers ducking in between his legs, to brush
the soft skin there, can feel the weight of him
against my arm, then pulled away, as we are laughing
up the hill, caught in the happy nonsense
of our voices, see him collapsing at my side, his spectacles
on, teeth brushed, tangling our legs, reading
unrelated texts as we egg on sleep. I see his mail

shuffled into mine. But then the great cars end.
No caboose, old man swinging a lantern through dark blue
that night fills with—the kiss is almost broken. The trees around the trucks
close in around the space the train had taken up, and moonlight...

MUNJOY HILL

On Munjoy Hill, the drunks walk steadily and pray,
carrying their paper bags stuffed with sandwiches
and plastic pudding cups to the top where the mock-up
lighthouse stands above plywood windows, bars
and bridal galleries. I trudge up Congress Street
like any man, grumbling at the sleet, the peckers at the bank,
the hungry in my way. Buddy jerks across the street,
squeals traffic to a halt, rants at bumpers

in a slur half-booze, half-damage from the car that slid
too near his forehead fifteen years ago. The king of drunks
wears socks that ladies of the church and childhood friends
slip to him in paper bags. On the third: Social Security. He's off
for seven days until it's gone. He appears: convulsing,
his royal hand shaking for a little change. The rash

of yuppies has not shooed him from these doors. I see
the shrimp of him, shrunk thirty years, milk-money-thief,

on his father's shoulder, wriggling, nosing a grimy glass
to spy great crates stand still against the war:
cans of Spam and powdered milk, soldiers' feast
under a broken window's arm of light. Dirty boy
in knickers swinging monkey-bars in yards Downeast;
a child a human mother pieced together—running uphill
from the slashed raccoon frothing by the well, lying poorly
how his eyebrows burned. Matches in linseed and blue gingham

in the shed behind the birch. You know, he had me say
a submariner leapt out from outer space and zapped him
with a ray. His mother pushed me quickly out the door...
Now, wild voices make merry with his sleep,
when sleep comes to him, in newspapers,
dishwasher boxes leaned against a jeweler's—and I
won't drop a dime, devil on whose belly tart cherubs leaned
and seraphim made prey. I squinted toward the rising moon

and belched, rubbing my sacs; fingers that tamped
clapboards down, held bristling hemp against hard rain.
Each night in boasts to waitresses: they brought the last tubs
of half-drunk tumblers. I wept as I wobbled home,
nameless judges traced my welts with salted fingers,
wagged their heads: freezing intellect incapable of delighting itself,
I sang my lice to sleep before I bent to eat them from my thighs.
Goat-eyed ogres munched my kidneys out, damned my near-devout wife

to a widowhood of sneers and fear of wine, and no one home
when I returned: old pinups leaned forward where they always did,
tits yellowed. I played into the drool-stained pillow
whatever I had left: blankets of paper mill stink tangled her
on cracked macadam: blood, rum, or she lurched off
with some jazz drummer, spree, one dusty August day
without a word. Sometimes, just died in childbirth. Only son...
Whatever I could say to get free rounds from whatever travelers

straggled at last call. Her wringing hands are still, that woman
that I claimed loved me far way. She never was,

and now

I can't be certain that that's the Buddy that I knew
tugging silk kites above steep hills of fluted grass
those long afternoons we ran in a western light, grasshoppers
popping through our crossed legs. We sipped summer's last lemonade.
He could be me: aspirins or yellowed laces folded into cedar,
the sea an afterlife of sheep.

THE BIPLANES

The dark hangar perches: sparse stars wiggling
in blue juices of space. Consider its contents: biplanes,
primitive cousins to the bus. Instead of gears
enabling their jerky propulsion, propellers
like stained thigh-bones of the woolly mammoth
spin horizontally, then diagonally, across the puzzled snow.
Consider what these wings were to the men
who sanded them by hand, unsure that adhesives
would hold against the sun, how sleet
would love their darling, miraculous whales
down into safety. Only home has any say in where they fly:
this shabby barn, the scrubby flatlands that surround it
are practical and safe. Hidden in the air are maps

that take us to each place that is unlike that: hills
like scalped clowns with lips pressed to the ground
in ambush, pheasants in fog darting
sparse fields of feathery milkweed. What difference
sustenance when airborne: to be without thought,
distraction, unlike real crows paying fierce attention to the ground
for darting specks that might be food. Oh,
to have a little nozzle for an anus,
located conveniently on the side, beneath my name!
Ideas leave thin shadows on the ground,
like colored cellophane used to, say, wrap Easter baskets,
or wire rings demonstrating land masses
during continental drift. Or parables:

lurching along the forest floor to drink rain
from the parted jaws of wounded does,
meanings held from us, warning us, candles
in paper boxes, reminding us how, generally,
we are amused, if mortified, by the rolling
and sniffing of sexual congress, reminding me
that you cannot be found anywhere, although your hand
grazes my cheek. Certainly no learned man
has felt this way, inarticulate, curling his hands before his face
as if to drag the notes of meaning forth,
or if they hang in traps like this, surely laughter
could pull them free. All day, crows sew into light,
the ages of the planet bump together at your feet.
In spring, there is so little left for squirrels to conceal.
I am uncertain why commerce forces thoughts to sleep
in dark sheds without any windows, why no one,
certain of their passion near this earth,
bear such a grudge against their wings.

IV.

LOKI BUCKLES THE HAG'S BACK

She drags the kettle through the brackish water,
moonlight freezing, dripping. Casts her shadow down, two shadows
follow her. He lies as sunlight, waiting for the chance to take her
as disguise. The fool of winter light curling in frost upon the grass.
The hearth stones hiss, bellows depleted at the grate: fruit bat
cowering in the spade shaped body of a lute. She prods the cinders
for baked roots. Through fire in water, blue pools rise:
discs of starlight condense the light, wrenching it. Splashed backward
on the backlit moss black cave. The crow—

hanging spirits twisting in the wind, tongues tied to the tree.
Black leaves burn, wind collapses them in orange light. Spiders
spin. His thin bones creak, scalds his nose by bending down
to boiling water asking for its word. Its word is good, already giving.
Hurricanes complain to him of little calm, the spin
of seasons eating dance about him. He is wing, a wheel, a mallet—
a song held silent in a bubble blown from lye. Sands
split his feet into the air, jumping like an oil on heated iron.

He gnaws the bear's broad claws in the ash grove.
The ripped wind splintering moonlight. He bones her, angry one
awaiting suitors in the hive. Hurls the ivory
on the overgrowth and gasps, surprised by his own trick, the marrow
burning, fragments, fragments blooming forth with flesh. Thin fingers,
teats depleted of their milk, dugs running—hulk, then giantess
bends then bends again, then shrinks: vertebrae
compacting, a squeezebox in her back, grinding rims:
sparks fly as she walks forth, the first tree's twig
her walking stick. She took. She painted it. She carved its name.
Thorns protrude from chutes, she picks the smallest sprig,
grinds the rest out with her scaly heel, her hand
blown back and forth by memory, chant, argument
and question. The spiders drag their homes
in through small holes. The sun takes back all water. Whales
humping the harbor floor bake and sputter.

THE OLIVE MERCHANTS

I.

Our hands tarnish in dirt,
we have placed stones, pat the dirt smooth. Silence
overtakes us, rubs up against our arms, melds us to autumn.
The stones do not amuse us now,
our silence roots with their silence. They are complete,

at one with everything: back through glass, sand, boulders,
mountains. The earth and its moon, toward the sun,
dim ember in nothing from which all creation blew, blossom of fire

in a bowl of black ice. We are surrounded

by nothing, nothing, not even remembrance.

A candle in the front sill, wind. He eats. Rapping
in the furnace, heat above blue flame,
coffee. Winter stars and ash
rattling, night without moon. Mice through lamplight
pockets, splinters from the broom. Onions frying, lemon
adventures, time. Steam. Clink of glasses. Ginger, milk, crumb. Faces
on eyelids. The tin tray that he sops clean with bread
reflects the inverse of himself.

II.

You know, Archimedes, it isn't as it used to be: we can't
just kill the people who displease us. You are more thought
than body to me now: disappointment with the earth's decline.
Who ever let it slip that plates are grinding deep underneath us,
how these hills escape? What idiot convinced you

to be learned of stones, a scholar of high plateaus and scribe
of deep ravines? Your decline is seen by everyone beneath electric bulbs
swinging on the orange cords from poles of weather-beaten wood. The
groves, in autumn,
reek of crazies' piss. They come conversing to the doors
of closed administrations, tugging at the water moccasins

that slide in and out their asses. Barbed wire red against a yellow sky:
one man draws wild sunsets by the pump
with his own blood. He cries because they never dry
the color that he needs. Drunks yowl, agonize his nights,
come with hyacinth, dowry for the great lord's lady of the hanging branch.

Your trees are a fairground for every misbegotten beggar
begging for a snipe. On Mondays, as you sleep, your hat
over your face, your hands folded in your lap, the blind ride by with burrows
in a daisy chain of monks who carry baskets full of rope
and agates they have gathered. You don't know it,

but I watch you, too. Rolling tobacco between fingers
thick with bones, scowling at truants dragging sacks of bottles to the cliffs
to shatter them. My arms! My arms! I feel the glass
as it pops on shell and piling, feel the ocean being pierced. I watch
the boys, half-clothed, picking through tide pools for periwinkles,

the bean-sized squid. When I leave you in the mornings,
I leave you pleased, anxious for cabbage and song. It is the season
to drown the fallen olives in the brine, but you do nothing. Smoke rakes
your fields while poufs cruise sailors in the chowder-houses.
The sea swells and the land creaks. Your fingers are smooth against

the taut wires of the zither, bleed in inch-long lines. You watch me while I work.

I kick the tips of these old cracked work-boots through the silt, call out to something

humping in the bougainvillea. The earth is ripe
with men in love. You drag your tongue across the stamps,
ask license of the leaves we burned. The warped clock ticks

high above the kettle on the ancient stove. Its glass is black. Enough,
enough. Fumble through your papers, my body is yours. Want
someone else. Want a steady wind to blow your land away. Want
the guano on the walls and in the attic here
to ripen to electrum. Fruit bats fall on me, lick my hands

for salt. Up here, from the moon shaped window, I lean out
to taste the wind. That man is by the wall now, making a still-life
with his head. I swat the broken bottles in the wall's mortar with my broom.

II.

Leaning a dusty arm against my kitchen sink,
at dusk, your thoughts fly on without me:

I am thinking I could fall into your limbs, a stone
falling into the gathered leaves this autumn,
tussle with your body for no reason than to show you
that I am thinking of anything but wings, or thunder. The dogs

have shadows without edges. It is too
silent where they convene, sniffing at old
bodies in the rocks. It is too silent in my body,
where all thought begins. Shouldn't there be symphonies
and tender thoughts of my beloved? Bright as it shines,
the moon is cold, and cannot burn
the swirling droplets of the day from here. I am not

a pale youth, sending my trembling heart out into the streets
with yearning. There are no chimes
on side streets, promising ices. I am gray,
gray as morning. Rain, carry me out of him.

III.

The night sky widens, black silk
tattered with stars. Its edges fray,
the olives spindle moonlight in their roots.
Fog darts the axe-blade waves,
ghostly boats we cannot board. Your voice
reports back from the other side,

having touched the grooved bark,
hummed in the kazoo paper
of the huge moth's wings. I wish
that your pale legs could be laced with mine,
or that at least you drunkenly
would wade into my passion. We would ferry

across the water until your fear of drowning
passes, then you would shake me
off, seaweed flicked from oar. On shore,
your laughter lives a second life, weaving
with the blackest water. I am tangled
in the clear grace of your eyes. The moon

is in its favorite place: mud-flats
that reflect. We came here to enter
each other's bodies: light carries us
into darkness, out beyond the bear-stars,
soft mouths, hands unsure exactly
what to do. Under stiff grasses, smaller stones:

nothing now between but salty water, shells.
So. You are as the sea is: passionate,
extravagant, laying kisses as tides plop
garments of shellfish on beaches. Now
I am the moon—a stone, peace in its belly,
happy to be here, but without

the necessities of passion.
So as Eve began her orchard,
the sea regrets its water.

IV.

His hair a black anemone in the water. He holds his breath,
immerses his body slowly in the wooden tub. When his mouth
comes to meniscus, it is too late for him to know
that he should have taken in air at this moment, and not before.
As he goes, I hear the deep bell of his voice—

Below, his eyes big with the effort to imagine oxygen,
I nod and think: "I know, I know. You
are a feathery sunset, but have grown
into a brute's wooden body.
Look love, how I bob. There's no home for me

in you, or underwater. I dive, otter
in the mercury of your contemplation.
There are no babies in this body. I am a shelf
to pile your books on. The mountains,
over the synagogue, the mosque: only clouds,

people walking uphill disappear

among them. There are days when all
that I can accomplish are small tasks:
a bath, a cup of coffee. I have become
a poem in Russian. You bitter my memory.
Nonsense is the tongue of emotion,
I cannot measure my words
when my hands are burning, when my face

is breaking. One word, I would wrench out of orbit.

V.

You squeeze your eyes shut when I touch your hand,
like a child does given a rope burn: be a man
around your wrists. If my wrists were frozen solid,
I would still touch you in the dark. What can I teach you?

One loves what one becomes accustomed to, one
to despise. Cattle die of thirst in snow, flurries
of disguised water. Leaves drink with their bodies,
wrestling through stone, through weed. Love—

there is a summer room within a house
five of my parents' houses could have slept in.
Reeds shook. Moonlight painted windows on the ceiling.
The sea across the street rolled me to sleep: my heartbeat

did this when I was a nub. My bed plummeted toward nothingness.
I cried. My voice fluttered through murky water. There,
a zoo of balloons spoke to one another with their ink
and under-skin. There was no interpretation of their flesh.

—I read fantastic stories until my weakening eyes
collided with their lids.

HOMECOMING

The bag boy and cheerleader drag their feet
along the walkway bedizened with spilled oil and paintings
left by fallen leaves: there will be no one, in a year,

to reconstruct these bodies speckled with confetti,
hands frilly with bouquets of paper flowers. Victory
will fill its nets with hoarse shouts, plumed eagles

pouring through the streets attacked by honks—
September: a girl in gingham and denim,
half mother dressed, pulled awkwardly

into her skin. Bartered hand with steering wheel,
gray-cherried snipe of a Marlboro,
watched the rear-view for angels

of exhaust. He: thin boy with circled eyes,
worried that if he were the Christ returned
how he might carry forth the resurrection.

Will he botch it, listening to the grocer Joseph's advice?
Will he lean into the expected marriage, work drywall
until his heart explodes from sodium and too much

malted liquor? You catch him, by the tennis courts,
with his hand held over the fog of the valley,
divining the sun. The river contained on one side

by the disused train tracks, and by the other
the right side of the tracks. You raise your hand
in compassion, but he is wasting his time. You

have tried this already. Nothing in nature
will change for you, Always you hawk
to prove you're no girl. He walks toward you

sideways, with his hands crimped open.
October. When the Potato Blossom Queen
comes rolling downhill, her football jacket draped

around her bony shoulders. Boys peep
from frosted Buicks through a haze of Pabst and Golden Anniversary—
snickers from the stacked virgin

whose thick arms wither into branches trembling with snow
before her tumbling, and there
you are: desperate for companions, jokes

from clerks in bargain stores, thinking
of eyes that once turned to yours for safety.
Crêpe paper pulps within the spectrum

painted on macadam, curving from a weed. Mothers

waving, sipping black coffee from Styrofoam cups.
You: look closely in dark water for your friends. You:

in his passenger seat, holding the cold can
to your crotch to keep the lizard hidden, glancing up
then down again. Your eyes do not pass

his breath against the glass.

LEMURIA

A crying lurches from the kitchen,
stalls and limps. I hold my palm

flat on the knife and fork
upon the paper napkin, extend
my hand for beer. A shadow stalls
upon the wall, my head, my neck,
the light from the bare bulb
on the goose neck lamp
must be very heavy on my back. The shadow
turns toward center, shrinks,
is nothing but a fly upon a red leaf
and flies away again. The ovals
of the throw rug spin and bounce.
She enters with the oven mitt extended,
Gumby-like and tattered,

and her blue eyes, lifted to mine,
blink. In the deep, diluted ponds
I see the tadpoles frisk, I see
thick eels slither from the birch trees peeling
into pulp. I see the mermaid
weep a sorrow invisible for the sailor
hugged too closely, pulled down
in a blithe, unthinking rapture
toward the deep trench
where no submarine has been, where
nearly eyeless fish follow
the lanterns that they dangle, drooping over
their wide and lipless mouths. Down there,

giant squid course, electricity as membrane.
The budders and splitters, trillions, microscopic,
crackle a green light above a city of wide
and doorless portals. Greek fire
rippling from the crusted green devices
of the street-lamp's torches. And then,
we rise, too quickly, toward the bends,
pressure pulling all directions
from our arteries and bones, nitrogen
following us within us as we rise.
She stares into my eyes, blooming slugs and sponge—
I am the sea. I am its ship. She sings
for the captain, strapped to the mast. I am not him. I am—
I am the tight knots at his wrist. I have his hands. They're mine. I go.

LOKI AND THE CHANCES

I run behind her, busy as a fox,

foxlike in my stink and brush,
then winged and prehensile, slither
and flicker of fin and rush of wing,

wing of oil bedizened
on the marsh-pool, fog
picking the moonlight from the fen
with swift, uncertain

fingers. Rainbow, bright horizon, firefly—
I hate them, gleaming,
on fire with love. The seasons
streak beneath her feet, wheels

of sprigs, unruly grass—
the burnished palette of the maple
and dying branch soldered
on the plain. Rain falls to her

lips to hear her whisper
amnesty. Dying mite: make him squirm. The worms
moon at him. Ravens hiss
their counsel in the high

anemone of earth's splendor. Lightning
brushes a bee's wing
from his cheek. I sit. And then I see
it. I see the scrawny twig,

its berries bursting with venom.

THE THROWING TOURNAMENT

I.

The harried god was blind and stepped aside, but I pushed him into place and held his hand. I used a young girl's voice that only he could hear. I was a harridan in rags to all who watched: spectators performing interest in the scene enacted, now, too long. The fool shimmying for their laughter. Flirting with the old ones. I smiled at the trees that they would have to bear his body on.

The sundial shining in noon.

Spring: thick within the grass.

The valley seen between the clouds. The clouds nearly still, dwarves pruned from the edelweiss. The ornament of storm becoming clear in them.

His mother: asking, and receiving, amnesty of all matter. Almost all of it. Matter impotent and jovial. The mountain

would lay his body flat on water, and the water ask him if he wanted entrance. Sharks would buffer him between their fins and lift him to the sand. Winter would speak winds to him tenderly. The tiger gnawing its own paw for food would close its mouth before his mouth. Centipedes crawl through his ears to wriggle in his balance. A slab swings into him, splits. Flames make puzzles of his robes: which fold holds light, which shadow? He stands, bright. Yawning.

I know the entry point. I hear the cheering. My little dart whittled from soft wood, the mistletoe. White petals red beneath The Crucifix. Who hears my cry? He hears it, but he thinks it is his. Wound that flowers make! Mischief, marry him! I am the hanged man in the corn, the maize is whiskey when mash steeps in the dark and hides from oxygen. The hag: the man who knows how blame will blow, smoke to who deserves it least. The directed hand. And his falling, then—

I stand below the star, waving at the world through grief: the burden of their sorrow hoisted on him, there. His body and his blood. Thyme flirts at the mountain for its hue.

II.

And his falling, then—
I taste with eyesight what the mouth of his most beloved
was doing when the dart struck. Fingers
twisting for the air, before the nerves
reported pain. The children, caught
from leaping at him, laughing. The sea below him

blue, no bluer than it had been. The clouds: quicker,
for no reason. The ones with wings: pierced by rain, curling
upward from the skin and shattering. Eyelids

in the slow curtains of a blink. An old man
fussing at his garment.

A leopard crouching on an antelope.

The blur of strings on thumbs against a lute.

Moan, pitch and breath suspended in all lungs,
along the throat and lips, into the flute, outward—

birds snagged in what they sang into the air.

The salt and sweet of lips on lips,

finger against finger, lovers trapped in their finagling
on the bending ferns
holding them firm from falling
to the ground. The drone

of pitch and whistle as the song

I sing continues and the man falls, mortal,
and the light changed. The great wheels thrown from balance: clack
and jerk of arcs on spokes stuttering forward. Ants hurrying with crumbs.
Fish continuous with current. An old man with his hook clawing
at a housefly. A young boy sobbing with his fists bloody on the outlines
of the warthog. Fingers probing rice for wedding ring—

her hand raised as he throws the milk-blue
body back at her. A man grinding glass into the lenses
for the Emperor. Fingers black with ink clicking
alphabets of type together. A woman vacuuming cubicles in a half-light.
A mother holding a deaf-child's clumsy mouth
up to a hot black nipple. Badgers scuttling from headlights. Wheelbarrow
rocking as the dung pile surges underneath the wheel. Frost
on lips. The tick of feet on baking sand. The scorpion—

what instrument? Water illumined by the yellow light of bobbing lanterns,

night flickering with paper ships. Rain in the trees along the riverbank
where the Girl Scout troop combs the reeds for Flossie. Smoke from the
wick
when the priest pinches out the flame. Lightning nowhere,

but the blue of its aftermath pulsing from everything. Houses shut from
might.

III.

I am the thief of broken things. The clearing
where two cripples hop. A drowned girl crawling up through water
toward the sharp beak of the cuttlefish. Whores snipping yellow dolls
with scissors from the plastic leaves. In yellow fingers being formed, the
winged
seeds of the tree: samara. Rain, carry me. I am the man, over there,

dredging the river for the rain. Molecules leaping from the wings
of moths to mingle with the flame. The bald monks in their robes
swaying with the fog along the mountain path. I am the trees
that lean to them, the temple where a cup lies in the broken light.
The leaf-print in its bottom that disrupts its glaze, I am the walk
swept free of leaves. I am the hand that scatters them. I am
a xinophoran clutching sand against an undertow. I am kelp and bits
of shell—foam sinking in—freighters tugging where the water drops—

the man and woman there, waving at the waves. The tug and push
of surf. The oceans and their edges, the grinding of the earth's surface
on itself. The stew that we have risen from, and the messages
that we carry. Seeds on the summer wind—the sun, speeding from center—
caught spinning at the edges of a dim and spiral galaxy—twisting off and out
—

water shaken from the sharp ears of a dog. The hum of speed
from gases at the center, from the spot—black hole
fighting for the whole, pulling in
at everything, and infinite, to loosen
into a universe
that spreads the luminescence of its own dimensions. Pocket and flash.
Collapsing light. Sound
pressed into thought. Rain on fingers. A frozen city where the hounds first
venture out
to snout for food among the traps. The cats and birds. People carrying
their children, for no reason, toward the moonlight, pointing up.
The moon over a frozen sea. The sun: just barely up, pushing at the
atmosphere
for blues and colors in the elements. Compounds bickering at hinges, clasps,
the burning ice—

light speeding from the gravity of atoms, the sky
one instant in the flutter of its wings—wings not as wheel but sphere around
which everything spreads, and at its center—

nothing.

Nothing.

What I perceive to be your heart: what happens there? Inside,
perhaps, another motion takes. The gods are swimming down. Their sons
pleading with them, bleeding from their sides. The boys admiring them
turn from them, shamefully, as they fall. I draw them as they were,
in the soil, with a stick. Madness and knowledge clash. I am fearful. At the
edge—
we flinch from light.

We know all this.

FIST

Calamity sang in the leaves:
the moon, full and sad, hovered
over the silver-lit land.
This distance, my love, sad thing

curling: a hand, that touched,
is warned of love, beetle
curling. Palm: no light. Night
seeps into its ironic fist.

V.

LOKI SWALLOWED

Break sleep. Turn
toward morning: sweat. Bird song.
Dawn. The bottom
of a blue sky. Love,

licking its hands
into a slow, deep river
of healing and low laughter.
Nine months, I am alone.

No more hurdles. The wind
slaps the moon. It rocks,
a pendulum. That dry, round
mouth: no tongue, no tooth,

plumbing—slow and cold—
the bed of black-weed river,
never speaking. Now, into me
branches grow, grafting

to my arms. I am the tree
that anchors me. I kissed
the mistletoe. It flew,
lovingly. Entered

hard, cold, dismally.

THE BLIND'S COMPLAINT TO LOKI

The snow closes its eyes to make a man. His hands
his own repast, he curls his toes around his neck and pulls.

Sucks the knuckles, chuckles and belches for his friends.
Silent birds surround them now. A tree: lost. Faces

crackle underfoot: what is it chills me when I see them?
His body. I am afraid to touch it. If I dig, will you

bleed on my fingers? How long? Suddenly
asleep have it made, considering my thoughts. Some bozo

bit my nipples on the bus. I'm glad that nothing happens
if you're poor. If you see them pulling at my zipper,

this is why. The bank's covered in clients, pointing
down. Pages bury the ashes: eyes, fingertips, he drops a scrap

of meat. His name echoes. Talons rise, clutching two
browned hands. Repairman leans, unbuttons shirt, opens

her eyes. Clenches her hand, scrubbed clean. A snapshot of her
on the river's edge, smiling, waving, as the bulb burst.

Bums beneath the bridge scratch a little girl in pink church dress
against the glint of moonlight on the dagger's side. Echo

of a cough. Window in the dark. New born babies' bones,
awaiting Danny, up against the floor, but losing. Strangers

brush against the dealer squeezing at your wrists, standing
on your tongue. Sprinkle pinch of you from rooftops. Papers opening

and closing on the faces of the punks. Get off my girls. Blow
into bare-assed bodies, climb creaky legs. Watch. Watch

how Fingers scurried with his spoon across the room, powder,
pushing you his belt. The plastic mascots chuckle, stand

in hundreds, silent, opening and closing in the dark. Danny's cigarette
circling: soul of lizard. Chasing tail.

Bald savior on the mount holding
her body linen. Bleed. His face escaping: legendary brother, whiskey

for the hell of it. Jumps her neck, missed wedlock, her dress grins
desperately. Tavern a fraction left alive when he became ready

in the body of his wife. "Tongue them Sunday!" Those frozen smiles,
those visitors. You can wrap the gang or God. His mother's intimates

dismissed to be scoffed at after. Funerals inherited the edges of girl,
anyone. A family stands, mesmerized by its white. His shoulders

flap, his hands fly. Let's count. One stood hissing, "Mother, pay
attention!" After, the sound of boy. One, I think, but no one speaks.

Lion lay one along the edge, scratched the bum. Throngs of scrubbed clean
faces. Night, the unkind little girl, oblivious, snaps to a rat: "Mittens

for the whiskey," Only way he knew to get orphans: lungs from the crime.
A scrap of meat dropped meters from a woman: hand. Embarrassed, climbs

a woman: stump. A crow collapses against toolbox. Too old and far
from water. Clumsy fall, he can't host bones already scrambled for

by pigeons. Weary on my belly. tap my star. By morning, I will know
my half. He reaches down, scratching years, where he packed—what?

I and our undoing. I and our undoing.
Wife asked by his sister: "Where

his body is? Where his body is?" On the roof, roof, beer in hand, staring.
Blink down MacDougall Bridge. Their fingertips won't say what I know.

I go because the stench is following. Rush from here. It is not bumping.
People held her face. Watch the dealer drop. Come in. I've been down

there. dark water constant mad. He stayed drowsy during final day. Made
me
beg him, shaking curls of wasted film, farewell. Where? The window,

then the moon. Floor on which he scrambled, old men dancing hop
for love. Thieves I would have gnawed. The banker forgot to cover up

the holes. His hand slipped. Bent, turned up, birds on the lips. I know.
I am afraid to touch the ribs, goats around me, light—
I'm glad that nothing
happens. I mites myself. Pinch a couple kids naked on linoleum. Lips,
show me my privates. River: the old coot bums gave away
beneath me darting into weeds. Sucking money from a woman on the roof,
knead a break from throats. But then, repairmen lean. Unbuttoned
shirts. Beer in hand, reach for his opening. A
mmonia. I became ready. More likely, in the dark. Wedlock. She built
nests between his ribs. It isn't always easy on our friend. It's all
bad. Prison. Opening and closing. Hair freezes to my hat. I curl
my toes around the buzzer.
Lost. My body sung by rats.
My body aching faces. Not your body. Not your body. Moon. Parade.
Games the tides play. Elm. Snow in airless heights, autumn. The sun fades
stripes in Danny's head. With his bum knee, on the mountain, holding
thunder, pointing down, crunched out by stomping feet. Rarely
photographed because
without breath. Throats she replaced the paintings with. Slips
my body in to typing. My family dig a ditch. That body hurts. I should have
been more careful. That is how things are. Now, the red truck
swallows one of those. Babies show me home. To watch. We can do
nothing else without his belt: you know then how the story goes. Go
this far with me. Red clay. Your fingers. You're poor. I never been
there. Church's windows in the dark change me. Change a baby's
bones? Ribs echo, blacked hands drop his feet, slipped hissing over
his bed. Flirting from ripped plastic sac, tapping eyes closed, day
he made me crackle. Underfoot, consider the dealer by their shoes.
Whisper. Won't say what I know, blowing into mouths. I bend down,
disappointed. His sisters pass where his body is. He sees
asleep. His half-bride shone. Let someone eat. Me. A fox bleeds
the first love. Her beautiful red hair fell out in clumps about her feet.
So much for Ned. The sun fades stripes in him, his hands splayed open.
Ready.

ANTAEUS

His hour, and no one pays him any mind. I am surrounded
by statistics like myself. I cannot count the men
among the closed umbrellas and rippling scarlet ribbons
who have touched me. Then, there is the mother, pressing
her arm to her heart to tug at her husband's sleeve: he must be
grumbling slurs into his fist. Blood is rum for money,
and the family swoons. The queens, preening in regalia
for their least adoring audience this season: on the cliff,
their web of influence is straining. Conversations drift
from their orbit's perimeter: the mixed metaphor is clearly
how the ladies feel. Miss Marmalade leans back, twiddles
twenty painted digits at me, not her favorite son. I nod.
Her coke-nail rhinestone glints in the spare October light.
The pastor with his threadbare Bible, wagging bookmark,

spun from silk—blood-red—that age has bruised black,
water-clouded, its fringe catching the hens of breeze
that tumble up from dock-yards. It looks like wings
slapping his fingers clamped there on the page. I should not
look up, for fear of catching Walter's eyes: I'd smile,
but I should not smile today, or brim with crying,
but I should not cry. So. I watch the ground. Yellowed grass.
Dew sparking in the branches that have fallen. Willow-whips
and acorns. A sundial, verdigris, below us underneath
a marble Gabriel whose trumpet shadows hours of the day.
Bees mumbling through clover. I can peg the out-of-towners
by their shoes: brown, or black, spotted with red clay.
The citizens had known the route and took the rose-quartz path
above the creek that drools out of the corrugated tube downhill,

through sea-grass, into Casco Bay. Men cruise here, when it's empty.
Richie stirs, blinking from beneath his Panama, and yawns.
He mimics frozen grimaces, and mouths "You can't get IT
from a bus, a hug, food-service-workers, or a bench!" At who? M.
His lips pursed as he ticks inane examples from his fingers. Ah,
the billboard of our lives. The practiced tear. The tilted head.
The bowl of prophylactics by the programs on the salver. Now,
Richie blows a kiss from mincing fingers. I look down
at my shoes and ponder trends in Modern Poetry. What else
could rein this white elephant of laughter and gasping
from rearing up inside me? What prayer? To whom addressed?
Where published for its answering? Another poem would close
upon a jonquil on a demitasse, and leave it there. The rhododendron
by the gate has been blown barren of magenta. There are Dead-heads

everywhere, hopped up on Goonybirds and Ex. The caravan
arrived while I was...they love the polished brass. Jay
knew them from his catering days, maybe met them in the crowd
when Joan Baez toured with Indigo Girls. It costs
a lot of money for a grown-up to appear that poor. God,
grant me serenity. And thank-you for such things as cheap
shampoo. The city councilmen are staring straight ahead:
Jay did not rest while It writhed inside him, waiting.
I recognize two nurses, monitor-sitters, pump watchers
while others slept, played cards, or leaned together
in the television's yellow flashes, counting each
other's fingers pressed between their sunburned legs. A poem
would follow each sister: back to Massapequa, Chappaqua,
Greenwich, Marietta, catch the sun on sun-bleached curls

of teacup terriers drowsing by the blue vase near the window
and the wicker bassinet. Give Latin names. The front lines
of the wan, suspicious ones gathered into tweed and hounds-tooth
arms, whispers of the most businesslike boys. They each
had flinched from the Band-Aid on my hand. Left fore-finger.
I hid it underneath my other arms, and waved. Scratched
at my nose. They herded absent children from my company
in half-completed sweeps. What prayer? What blossoms
should I scrawl for you? The carnations on the casket shake:
pompons and red bunting. Chrysanthemums and dahlias. Nathan reaches
for the flask of schnapps strapped between his argyles
and his ankles, slides it into Jimmy's hands. A sneeze
becomes a swig, and the old man to their right jumps up
to fan his neck. Nathan smiles at him with sharp teeth, chipped

from retching. To be young and thin. He pats the seat.
Done beguiling men with tales of punting days at Loomis Chaffee.
I think I know just how the other feels. Sitting close
between the lovers when I was a new acquaintance to them,

fourth wheel of an abandoned threesome. Spittle on my cheek.
The urge to wash my face. Any false move left me prone
to what's-his-name, Dorothy the Separatist, whose rage
was just for me. Lucky Pierre! What man could come
this far and think that schnapps could be mistaken for
Listerine or chewing gum? What man could reinvent the spectrum
for the Broadway stage and write six operettas for the deaf?
Whoever I am not, apparently. Was there ever a New York
that was not a lazaretto heaped with Hefty bags
crammed with hustlers, dancers, lawyers? Men who scurried

in replica by day, fanned out, after dark, into Manhattan's
catacombs: secrecy in deference to clothesline chatter
and the need to eat real food. Not that thirty years would bring
arenas cheering with the cures of Promise Keepers, Scientologists,
back-room beatings, the progress of enlightened times...not every
terrorist is Muslim, wielding planes. Strobe-light flashes:
a thin man whisking up a rain-swept alley with a National
Enquirer for a hat. Two brown eyes bruised by memory. Phone-lines
charged with longing. A blond man scrubbing dirt of small hours
from the perfect lamb-chops of his chest. Splinters of ink-stamped
crates of weak plywood. Blue tissue-paper blooms: kiwi-fruit
and bruised persimmons. Marko who burned the blue lobster
while watching the blind man buy the rodeo-boy with yellow
pencil earnings. The feast—common crustaceans—laid out for him

on paper plates to mourn the money, vanished over chain-link
toward Chelsea. Germaine, crowd gathered by the bathroom door
to catch the doo-wop aria of his bath. His audience: lepidopterist,
sous-chef, drummer, Fenian, thief. The analyst. The pill-freak
pimp. Jay was less nostalgic, spoke frankly to the greenhorn
from the end of love. "The funerals were fabulous and plentiful
before you came along." Picked through the celery swords. Sipped
carrot juice. Placed the paper cup down on the glass-top
table, as if his fingerprints were weaker than the charge
and gravity of the daisy-eyed side. Fumbled at the plastic snap
calendar of pills. How Nate hissed into the phone: "Happy for them?
Happy—?" Asked to keep sickness from the ring of light
that his nephew and his bride would shine above *The Silver Oyster Room*
of *The Captain's Keep*, Ogunquit. Jay faded. Doddered through

the gray December light. Bent. Looked up at me, through fever,
leaning on the register: "When you get AIDS you'll see
how people really are." A beat. The myth: inevitability.
Croaked: "If. That was a horrible thing to say to you." Stung.
His apology had left him there alone. What hymns shall I cleave
your soul with at your parting? Whispers of your drip-dry shirts,
flat men hung on heads of red metallic hooks. Shall I beat
these husks for lack of bells? Crumple leaves the bells
had felt, sing out to the Zeitgeist of the leaves that stirred—?

A swallow in a bamboo cage? The child-god captured cricket? Dude,
I only knew you fifty weeks. I am the heir of beauty
that I never held. A card-trick after Hamlet. I am what the only
half-scoffed-at conspiracy is after. What God is there to guide me
from his flocks? Antaeüs, with his arms of mineral and magma,

tensed in the magnetic, static passion of his mother, Earth?
That champion, the tree? It only took a hunk like Hercules
to sweep him off his feet into defeat. You see, we have been led
to trust that we have all been made enemies by love. The scrape
of boyish lips on whiskers drowned out in percussive, book-taught
anger. And that's not it at all. Who convinced these kids
that to be sickened would be alliance with the casualties
of freedom? I will not paint a half-moon over crossroads where men
hang themselves in unrequited sin. I will not offer an emptiness
to the tenderness of understanding women, nor to the mission
of each sinner to repopulate the territories. No one spoke
when it was ours alone, when we shared it with the crib
of Africa. Perhaps the dismissed understand this: that love
does not dim with fear, or time in life. Once, were we not all

proud to gauge these bodies' change? Things have changed:
medicine assuages doom, spread amongst the people. Still: no one
speaks. Twenty-seven years of rags for flowers. Gentian, primrose, daffodil—
look. Look. The brass balustrade, the purple velvet curtains, banners
and bouquets won't say what I know, what I can almost
say. Look. A man lies horizontal on a satin raft. Vinyl albums,
white circles rubbed into their covers, stacked behind him,
pressed up to the hinge: *Dusty in Memphis*, *Bella Donna*, *The Divine*
Miss M. Guilty, *Lady Soul* and *Blue*. Disco mixes in their jewel cases
spread out on his lap, a royal flush. Ladies, did you come
closest to singing what we died to feel? They did not die to feel,
but died. Sapped cold, despite their passion burning too much
for one body to contain. Yet: not enough for life? My ears
are hot with rage. Jimmy tweaks my cheek and warns me

that the tray of brownies on the buffet might be "fun." Jay's sisters
are escorted down the ochre path to limousines whose chauffeurs
lean by waiting doors, umbrellas held like walking sticks
below the skidding clouds. It has not left me sick or widowed,
celibate to appease. Husband of Nothing, nor eunuch for girls
to pine at, father in sympathies I do not hold. Here, where we part,
it flickers in the feathers of the blue-jays clawing at the eyes
of seagulls and the dirty city pigeons diving for their nests.
It folds into the skirts and trousers of the cousins out of Bethany,
splattered cinnabar, mercuric earth. It stands reflected
in the sunshades of the Phish-Heads, revelers never long in mourning.
Too much has met here for anyone to bear. The people, and the numbers
they forget, to which I add my hand, cut as it was—it does not matter

why I bled. They watch my hand. It frightens them. It hovers,
hummingbird above the lilies as I suck their fragrance in.
It sips the nectar of the orchids of the night to keep
its song-box clear. It creeps into the cellars of the righteous,
curls and swims among their curios, their keepsakes and the broken
panes. Look in the emblem of the finger-bone sized shovel
of the pewter saccharine spoon: a beetle rolls its ball
across the carcass of a jackal. A sandstorm rips across the stones
that had been the rib-cage of a boar-like beast whose children
flopped back in the Tethys sea and years would spread them
into whales. A monkey scratching at a fossil. It sleeps,
a luster underneath the tarnish of the Norse and Roman coins,
a shekel dented from the biting. It lies prone in the coal-bins,
in a shape like mine. It slithers into rain to be invisible again.
It wants us all to be alone. Alone. But here we are—
tear this paper and remember them.

LOKI BEGS THE MISTLETOE'S FORGIVENESS

The women are howling at his feet, their skirts
pulled up above their shoulders by the wind. The ravens
sing to the limp body. I could find a cave. Trap the ceilings
for bats, gorge on the wings. I can see everything from here,

it is too much. A girl running from wheels, pressing
the gecko. A bald man banging the flats of his palms
against a window: inside, a baker drying to the floor
where flour blackens. Men igniting. Interweaving bodies.

The window opening for his fist. Lacerated fingers pulling
loaves from the oven, blood soaking the scraps. A soldier,
smiling. The eating man, laughing, his lone eye bright
beside the weeping lid. The soldier winking back at him, fumbling

for the zipper. Three legged lizard limping behind him. Dogs
skulking in its eyes. Chasing their tails, diving into the brackish river
for their masters. Leaping for the stick—pigs are smarter.
Never chase the stick they're beaten with. The air smells of fur

and mud. A broken doll is splayed at a tree's roots. No one saw
the vandal take the body. I saw it. Children skipping stones
on the brook. The falling butterflies. A sparrow in a box
of mirrors. Streets crawling with lice with no bodies

to drink from. The dogs howling. Sluggish bugs tapping
the drying lamps. Marshes, blue fields. Something inside,
not moving. The moon: obscured by flapping, feathers
trapped in kudzu. Screams and tearing. The sound of spilling.

Dismembered cattle, bones picked clean. Piping. The brain
of a bantam beneath a knife-point. Children on a cart, pressing
their faces between the slats: the blur of fences. Flakes of mica
in a brook. Fists shattering a doorframe. The door still standing

A woman leaning on her rake, blinking through sweat
at gorgeous buds. Timothy grass and leather-winged
leaves. A bead of salt water faltering on her lip. Autumn,
her evaporating face. Lettuces in the garden bed, avenues

of corn. Swelling ovaries of a waxen pumpkin. Sunflowers
nodding toward the crow on the scarecrow's shoulder.
Prickly cucumbers covered in honeybees. Fledglings
hungry in a nest. A cat padding toward the arbor. River-water

shaken from the beards of the dogs. Burning flowers,
opium. Fists underneath a wedding dress. Prehistoric insects
trapped in sap. Penguins on ice-bergs. Pudgy frogs
squatting. Hives and foxglove. Feverfew and dried spiders,

tools brushed with dust, dandelions. Under ice, protozoa
thicken and split. Oxygen. Horses curtsying like kites.
Worms in shadow, algae caking bones. Daisies sprouting
from the sockets. Black swans drifting near the dumps, their wings

opening in smoke. Chipmunks scurrying through ashes. Cashews
dropping on the roofs of mausoleums. Umbrellas spreading,
bats in a green light, on a creaking bridge. Crickets. Owls
drifting in a windless night. Candles brightening a window:

a frog. Two men laughing. Stones on the riverbed,
drowsy trout. The men, fish fleeing from their pockets,
their thoughts caught in the chambers of a sponge. A child
being sculpted within its mother. Crowded streets. Boys

with yellowed teeth. A painter kicked in the sacks
squinting at sunrise. Something frozen in the belly of a stone.
Fur on iron pyrite. Rhubarb musk on fingers
pricked with briar. A mountain swelled with apples. Cloth

that smells of citrons. Fern and straw. Snapdragons. Old men
climbing trees in autumn. Vapors in caverns. Bunched wool.

Angel fish leaping in a glacier. A hat shaped mountain. Vines.
Meteors showering a thorny orchard. The rain: a palace of zithers.

Spotted hands in prayer, moths closing their wings
in sleep. A pony in a crocodile's jaws. A drunkard
drooling images on stones. Zebras climb the banks,
clay drying in their manes. Eels in rushes. The pulse

of fireflies in sheets of heat lightning. Stars lighting on still water:
lotuses of rime. One star sliding from the moon, a mountain—
the algebraic shadows of the gulls dropping through still air. The smallest
fragment of an atom—gravity a throat screaming the sky in—

my ears are so close to the ground I can hear the mountain
beating.
The brogue of the bees. The stifled mouths
of the flowers. The stream remembering

the snow, and what it fell to. The spindly fingers of a girl
as she pounces on the cat that pounces on a field spider
in a rain of wheat. The spider darting into its hole
where it dances underground.

LOKI SPITS BARK TOWARD THE PYRE

The racket of the birds smells like bugs: worm and ruin. A spotted cur
is creeping through the brush, its snout down and its sharp tail poised
still, straight out. The ocean scratches at the shore, its clutch
pulls back with little: a solution of sand, polished stone, shells
outgrown and seaweed it had pushed to land, and now takes back again.
The water is so clear there in the pool, the tide just barely reaching in to stir
the fins of sleeping fish.

Oh, hush.

They're dead. Glittering purses from which the memory
of the first births, shuddering in pinnate bones,
has been abandoned. The sizzle of the brain
condemned to stall at fish: how the maps move on, picking up
colors from the codex of the broken shark. Fish have sharp white teeth,
their silence a messenger.

The barge glitters like money, coins in mounds
of gold and silver, green and tarnish, a mountainside of flowers.
The sea will come for me, drench
my filthy muscles, drawing poison from my carcass, leave me
polished. His eyes,
thumbed shut are wide and kind in their surprise. How I
hate him. How I loathe the wind, the drift of stars

within my throat: my voice whistles, spheres burning circles
into space: I would be bone, belief or tragedy, the eaten thing. The lord

of prongs. The polestar rises for the moon. The torches lower
to the kindling and the oars. Light touches light,
light folds about itself and flees into the surf, nudged toward the horizon
by the electric host.

I have been the maker—
see, they come to me, their wild eyes sadly mortal. They breathe—
the winged ones in their armor, the scholars in their cloaks—four winds
taken in and blown up into the mountains from their lungs,
granite cracking in the element tainted so
with me. I would be shine and stick, I would be wave. I am instead
welcomed into chain, stripped of my skin,
bone on bone, an instrument to play a war from
with a pitch-hardened stick.

O light—
I should have laid beside you on your crackling bed—
noon, a light that blinds and bickers, burns and seals. The planets
drop about me, comets pouring from the dark
to scold me, alloy holds me in the twilight
for the twilight. The barge bloodies the foam. There, my eyes
turn inside out, quavering to meet my knees at the sand's edge. Filled with
firelight—
I want him back. I do. My enemy freed by smoke into the air. The beetles
that my hands have been peck at my face: flames that cannot burn them.
They buzz and jump,
burning, dripping, flying straight up for my eyes. I cannot stop there
looking at my face. When I look up, it's me, it's me in mirror, invisible
under a green canopy. The fire refuses me.

Full moon: I erase my hand.
Ice leaves no wound, and bleeds ice water. My voice echoes
chattering birds. My heart: hissing, snapping at the air. A stone
beneath frost and hooves. One raven caws, one bell, the moon cries out—
tugs at me, but my wings have given to great orderings
Let me wash away, chalk in summer rain. Breakers cracking glaciers.
Fish darting, jewels stirred into being by the sun.
Star pulsing in my pupils. The flat pools show no star. Things
crawling on the rocks: baboons, lobsters—the sea surges
up the sides, lizards crawl from their holes to lick lichen off. I'm bad
but glad I'm rising to the pinnacle of moon. Dim,
slim papers in gathering shadow, vegetables and grains. Alive. Frenzied.
The wings may burn, but they are changing. Tomorrow, there will be no
flickering
below the mountain. There may be people crowding, cupping hands
over embers to be warm. They need to bronze their bodies
with his love: strands of silk the winds wrap shadows in.
They amble through the thickets, ghosts of slaves, tugging
burdens through a dim light to become it.

LOKI AND THE RAVENS

The blind man meanders through the stones. I hear him
before I can see him, cracking nutshells between his teeth,
and he becomes confused by this, loses his way. It is all I have
to hear him coming. I do not call out to him, or throw

my voice to hear him tumble in the scum of the low pools.
It would make me merry but I hold
my tongue. I watch the smoke, the thin clouds
brushing the mountain-range of thunderhead, and in it

ravens, dream and memory, their feathers lit
by flickering of lightning. The moon is a chance
through tunnels in the storm, where the wind is stronger rushing
downward than it is blowing north, or up. I watch

electricity and rain becoming born in sleet. I watch
Jupiter with its shell of hurricane, Saturn and Neptune
in their belts of soot. I watched a hundred stars come clear,

but soon enough talons were deep in to me, and dangling

from black beaks were rags of meat from me
before my clenched lips. The blind man: I see him. His eyes
are pauper's pockets. He hates me and forgives me,
sits at my feet, spreading their tentacles of mossy anemone

into the earth still saturated with bleeding of the young man
that I killed. I killed him out of mischief. I murdered him
because I did not want him, and I did not want
anyone else to want him. It was only a flower. A twig. A thing

you might give a stranger in the road who looked
as if they felt like a stranger in the road. The blind man brushes
feathers from my limbs, saying, "Can you see
now, friend. Can you see? And he recites to me:

pulling his arms around his knees, sings me the poem
from a smooth stone scratched with warnings—
fragments scattered among the broken cities—
warnings and what the lost had learned.